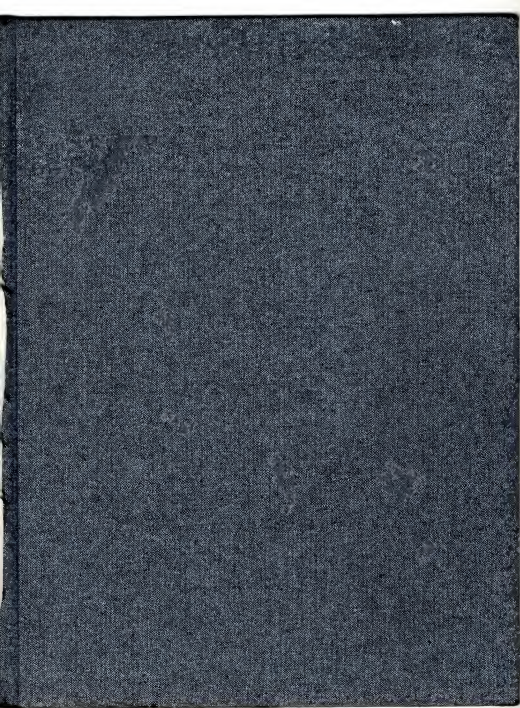




The Dance Bands







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The Dance Bands

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ARLINGTON HOUSE
PUBLISHERS

NEW ROCHELLE, N. Y.

British edition published 1972

U.S. edition published 1974

"To Mary, with love."

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number
74-488
ISBN 0-87000-272-4

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Printed in Great Britain

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Foreword

I have known the author for many years.

Although every instinct within me battles against the acceptance of the appellation, facts and dates force me to the conclusion (formed, I know, by everybody else) that I am a veteran in the sphere of music so admirably covered in this book by Brian Rust. I have reached the stage where discussions upon, or reminiscences of, the world of dance music resolve generally into an imparting by me of experiences and knowledge to whomever is concerned with me in these discussions and reminiscences – be they musicians or laymen.

But not so with Brian Rust. In his presence I feel as though I have been forever travelling on an outer circle without venturing far into the area it surrounded. True, in my forty-odd years of music-making I have met and known many of the personalities in this book, but I could never claim the possession of anything like the author's knowledge of the world of jazz and its history. I have talked to him often (and when reference-books have not been available), and have never failed to be amazed at the manner in which he can discourse upon the develop-

ment of jazz – from its “pioneer” days right up to the present.

Not only does there exist this unique historical knowledge (which could, I suppose, be acquired by a dedicated student over a lifetime), but in the author I find a discrimination worthy of a top-class performer. He has always evinced an understanding of quality, whether or not an eminence has been achieved with the gullible public through “gimmicky” bowler-hats, queer garb, “special effects” and the like. The fact that Bert Ralton, in the 'twenties, could smoke a cigarette at the same time that he was playing a saxophone would in no way affect Mr. Rust's undoubtedly good judgment as to the value of Ralton's contribution to the dance music of his time.

I have read this book, and am going to read it again – and again. I know I have more than a layman's concern with the contents, but I am certain many, many people will find these pages absorbing, nostalgic and most enlightening. Even youngsters could thrill to this story of the art that has not only produced their kind of “pop” music, but also that of their parents – and grandparents.



1.12.71

Benny Goodman at the outset of his professional career.

Introduction

As they danced in the ballrooms of the Savoy, the May Fair, the Dorchester or the Piccadilly Hotels in London, or the Waldorf, the Biltmore or the Roosevelt Hotels in New York, or listened to the popular tunes of the day on records or radio played by those same bands, few if any who enjoyed what they heard – and some would sooner miss a meal than a broadcast by some famous dance band! – could ever have dreamed that in their lifetime, that music would become the subject of avid record collecting, sociological studies and theses, and simply plain honest nostalgia. They did not, could not know that the world they lived in then would be put on the rack of war again (for wasn't the conflict of 1914-1918 "a war to end wars"?), and its manners and modes ruthlessly changed, sometimes for the better, often for the worse, but changed, and with it the fashions of speech, behaviour, dress and of course popular music.

In the course of this book, we shall meet names that became household words at the time and have stayed so; others who entertained us but which have been so long gone from us that they may be only dimly remembered, if at all. Much of what these

bands played was poor stuff, musically, by any standard, and the trite, the obvious – the "corny" if you like – often made a greater impact on public fancy than the better quality product. This book sets out to provide an account of a fascinating facet of entertainment during an era that had a character all its own, seen against the background of world events.

At the time, dance music was known to a great many people as "jazz." Any piece played by a band that included a saxophone in its ranks was a jazz performance, and if it was labelled "foxtrot," as over three-quarters of the dance band output was, it was automatically regarded as jazz and – by the older generation anyway – derided or reviled accordingly. We know now that while the inter-war period dance music stemmed from original jazz, and that it is generally agreed among connoisseurs that the use of jazz characteristics or flavouring usually gives a more inspired and inspiring performance, the average dance band on either side of the Atlantic was not a jazz band and had no pretensions in that direction. It thus seems a little unfair, if not stupid, for jazz "experts" to dismiss as worthless the work of many of the great bands, merely because they do not play music coming within the narrow confines of jazz definition. There have been many books on jazz, some written in an uneasy style mixing romantic fiction with a few facts, others composed of phrases more suited to the lecture hall or a psychoanalyst's couch than a book on a form of popular music; there have been very, very few on dance music. It is hoped that this volume will reawaken interest in the subject among those who lived through the 'twenties and 'thirties, and – dare I hope? – arouse enthusiasm among some who are not old enough to remember first hand, but who secretly wish they were (such do exist, I know!).

I began my own interest in dance music in 1925, when I was little more than a toddler; it fascinated me then, and it does so yet. (Some may say this proves I have not grown up, and that the music is as infantile as its detractors affirm; I remain unmoved!) A good deal of the subject-matter, then, is based on my own experience and memory, and on what I can find in





Top: Stéphane Grappely, one of France's most outstanding jazz musicians.

Above: Paul Whiteman and his orchestra during a break in a recording session for HMV, June 1, 1923.

my library of gramophone record catalogues of those years; but without reference to such periodicals as *The Gramophone* and *The Melody Maker*, both still flourishing happily, and the now-defunct *Sound Wave*, much that is useful and interesting could not have been included. Nor could I have given so full an account without the help and encouragement of good friends such as Anthony Pollard, Editor of *The Gramophone*; Edward S. Walker and his son Stephen, who provided a huge heap of information from various out-of-print magazines to which they had access; Christopher Ellis, of EMI Records, Ltd., who obtained much valuable information from the files of his company when I was not able to see them myself, and George Port, also of EMI Records, who gave up much time in making these files available for my inspection whenever I could make the journey to his office for that purpose; Geoff Milne, of Decca Records, Ltd., who painstakingly noted everything of value in *The Melody Maker* and classified his findings, as well as making his company's files available to me; and the many willing helpers, most of whose names I do not know, in the New York offices of RCA Victor and CBS Records, whose reception for me when I visited them there was little short of royal.

Nor can I forget the valuable help given me by the men who made the music: Sylvester Ahola; Roy Barge; Noel "Chappie" d'Amato; Joe Daniels; Roy Fox; the late Ted Heath; Ellis Jackson; Jack Jackson; Joe Jeannette; Billy Jones; the late Nick LaRocca; the late George Melachrino; Ray Noble; the late Jack Payne; Norman Payne; Sid Phillips; E. O. Pogson; Bill Rank; Earle Roberts; the late Lew Stone; and the late Paul Whiteman. All of these cheerfully underwent a kind of "third-degree" memory-racking, usually for hours at a time. To them, and to their colleagues who gave so much pleasure to so many countless millions, and who by their records are still doing so, my sincerest thanks.

Donal Rust.
10-2-72.

1 Stick around for the new jazz band

When the Original Dixieland Jazz Band set foot in England on April 1, 1919, its five members brought a strange new kind of dance music to the Old World. England had known ragtime music for years; the great John Philip Sousa had introduced it as part of his concert repertoire during his first European tour in the summer of 1900, and it had had further representation the same year when the most famous of all American banjoists, Vess L. Osman, also included it in his concert programmes. It was not thought of as dance music, however; the Edwardians preferred to step daintily to waltzes, polkas and the lancers, with an occasional barn-dance for those daring enough to let themselves go somewhat. When the Original American Ragtime Octet, a vocal group accompanied at the piano by the late Melville Gideon, appeared at the London Hippodrome on September 23, 1912, ragtime had already become a national fad, so that the Hippodrome revue *Hallo Ragtime* that followed three months later was almost *nieux jeu* (albeit very popular). Nevertheless, a glance at a collection of dance programmes dated from the beginning of 1912 to the spring of 1914 – each with its tiny pencil attached by a brightly-coloured silken thread! – reveals a high preponderance of waltzes of various kinds, with only an occasional two-step. Recordings of the period show how stiffly military these were, even American bands playing them with ramrod precision.

The leader of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the late "Nick" LaRocca, told me he found this kind of dance music still very much in vogue in England immediately after the first world war. "We played one-steps," he said, and such was the feeling of relief among the young people who had been spared from further physical and mental torture that they embraced "jazz" with open arms, and the Dixieland Band was a huge success.

They had come from New Orleans to New York via Chicago, completely capturing the American dancing public, though most of the older generation condemned their music as a sign of the decadence of modern youth, as being anarchistic, degrading, symbolizing a return to primitive jungle habits, and what

was the world coming to? For the five Dixielanders used no written music; LaRocca never learned to read, but mastered his chosen instrument, the cornet, by sheer trial-and-error persistence (as long as he was able to play, he fingered the valves with his left hand instead of the usual right). Basing the free styling of the new jazz music on march themes, flavoured with ragtime syncopation and relying on memory and a genius for improvising new tunes on the harmonies of existing ones, LaRocca and his four colleagues on trombone, clarinet, piano and drums overturned the dancing habits of this country as surely as he had those of his own, although the band only appeared one night in the show for which they had been booked by Albert de Courville. This was *Joy Bell*, which opened at the London Hippodrome on March 25, 1919 as the band sailed belatedly from New York. (Their pianist had succumbed to the influenza epidemic a month earlier, and a substitute was not easy to find; there were ragtime pianists a-plenty, but jazz required something more than a musician who could lay down a four-square military-style syncopation.) The occasion of the band's first appearance on any stage in England was on April 7, 1919. In the cast was a British comedian who symbolized the old guard attitude to jazz when he told de Courville that if the band was not sent packing, he would quit the show. He was the late George Robey, and such was his popularity at the time that de Courville dared not sack him in favour of a little-known American "novelty" act. So he arranged for the band to appear in a number of night-clubs in London, notably Rector's in Tottenham Court Road, and the Embassy in Old Bond Street. These were far more suitable venues for those wishing to sample the exhilarating strains of the new jazz band; it was all very well to sit in a theatre and watch them playing, as they gyrated, lifted up their evening-dress coat-tails and pointed their instruments at the roof, while the teddy-bear on the cymbal kicked and jumped every time it was hit by the exuberant drummer, Tony Spargo; but so compelling was the rhythm that, in the words of a poster outside the London Palladium (where the band appeared for two weeks

around Easter, 1919), "it made the feet ache to dance."

The same poster goes on to say that this brand of jazz was "quite unlike the various renderings already heard in this country." It was indeed; the word "jazz" was originally applied by San Franciscans to anything vivacious or vigorous, particularly in the sporting world, specifically baseball, and by Chicagoans to sexual activities, long before it was associated with anything musical, but it reached these shores in the summer of 1918 with only its musical connotation. It was then that the British song-writer Joe Tunbridge wrote *Stick Around For The New Jazz Band*, and Elsie Janis, a top American vaudeville star who had endeared herself to the troops by scorning the discomforts of their fighting conditions in France and entertaining them in the front line, introduced what was described as "a Jazz Melody" - Shelton Brooks' *Darkest Struttin' Ball*. (It was Elsie Janis and her fiancé Basil Hallam, who was killed in an air smash over France in 1916, who introduced the foxtrot to London in *The Passing Show of 1915* at the Palace Theatre, and this form of dance remained the most popular basic step for the next thirty years or more).

The "jazz" heard in this country prior to the advent of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band was in accordance with the popular misconception of it: sheer noise, with liberal featurings of the percussion department. It was considered correct for a "jazz" performance to have the drummer surround himself not only with a considerable acreage of tympani, cymbals, snare and kettle-drums, but tubular bells, gongs and the entire contents of a well-stocked hardware store; frying-pans, zinc baths, jugs and saucepans and so on. Wrote one critic, some years later, recalling all this: "It gave the sensitive listener the impression of an Armenian massacre," and no doubt this was hardly an overstatement. The first "name" band to include the word was Murray Pileer's Jazz Band, which played popular commercial "ragtime" in such places as the Trocadero, the Oxford Theatre and the Savoy Hotel between August, 1916 and 1922. Pileer was a New Yorker, a drummer-showman, who made his home in London throughout the 'twenties and 'thirties, leading various bands in such resorts as Ciro's Club, the Wimbledon Palais de Danse and the Prince's Café in Piccadilly. His "jazz band" recorded four non-jazz titles as such for the old Edison Bell Winner label, and playing any of them today bears out the accuracy of the statement on that Palladium poster. The sound is stiffly synopated, and bears a much closer resemblance to that of the bands that preceded the Dixieland Band on its home ground.

The two most famous of these pre-jazz "name" bands (as distinct from units that were recruited for recording only, usually from concert and symphony musicians) were the negro Jim Europe's and the white Joseph C Smith's. Europe's Society Orchestra played for the famous exhibition dancers Vernon and Irene



NECK LA INDOGO.

Castle at their Castle House in New York; it was principally a string orchestra, with one or two brass players, a reed man or two, and a drummer. Later, after the United States entered the war on the side of the Allies, Lt James Reese Europe commanded a large concert orchestra known as the 369th Infantry "Hell-Fighters" Band, which offered all kinds of music for the entertainment of the "doughboys" in France, in addition to ragtime for dancing. The Hell-Fighters returned to New York after the Armistice of 1918, and led the Victory Parade there three months later; but on May 9, 1919, Europe was murdered in his dressing-room by one of his drummers in a fit of pique. His principal vocalist was Noble Sissle, who in partnership with ragtime pianist Eubie Blake, and later with white composer Harry Revel, toured Europe as a vaudeville act, and in 1929 brought a band to London and later to Paris, playing at Ciro's in London for a brief season. Today, at 81, he must be regarded as the youngest old-timer in the business, for his enthusiasm and vivacity have not been dimmed by the passing years.

Joseph C Smith was a classically-trained violinist whose orchestra took up an engagement in New York's Hotel Plaza in 1916, playing standard popular tunes of the day in a lilting, almost decorous synopated style which changed not at all during the next six or seven years. Smith's own playing was akin to that of the Hungarian gypsies whose small string orchestras, playing anything from genuine gypsy

music to romantic ballads and semi-ragtime numbers with practically all the syncopated phrases smoothed out, were popular in plushy restaurants and tea-shops in New York and London and elsewhere. (An example of this can be heard on a twelve-inch record Smith's Orchestra made early in 1921 of a selection of the best-known tunes from the Jerome Kern score of the musical comedy *Sally*; nevertheless, it is a typical dance record of the period, of which Smith made dozens for Victor, many of which were issued in England by HMV and which sold prodigiously. His best seller, however, was a bucolic version of a genuine negro blues composed and published by WC Handy, *Yellow Dog Blues*. This record, made in October, 1919, featured the maniac laughter of the leader, echoed ferociously by his trombonist, Harry Raderman. It was probably considered by those who flocked to buy and dance to it as a superb example of "jazz" at its best; their parents were probably as repelled by it as many parents of teenagers today are revolted by some of the more bizarre "pop" groups.)

Joseph C Smith took his orchestra to Montreal in the summer of 1923 for two years, and in October, 1925, he brought it to London for a season. By that time, however, his name was of little appeal to the dancers. Had he preceded his better-known colleagues, had he come five years or so earlier when his name was prominent on record labels and the catalogues listed

many titles by him, he would have probably fared much better; as it was, he returned to America and vanished into complete obscurity. He was last heard of working in some menial, non-musical occupation in Florida until not long before his death in 1969. When he left these shores, however, he did so without his drummer and trombonist, Teddy Brown and Bill Hall respectively. Brown was a legend in his own lifetime; he was more famous as a xylophonist of amazing dexterity, and even as a saxophonist, than as a drummer, and for nearly twenty years he toured the halls of the United Kingdom as a soloist on these instruments. He was best-known for his immense girth, which contrasted almost grotesquely with the rapidity with which he manipulated the xylophone hammers. It seemed impossible that a man weighing obviously something like 20 stone (nearly 300 lb) could produce such agile music. He led his own band for a time at the Café de Paris in London during 1926 and 1927, before going as a soloist. He died during the 'forties. We shall meet Bill Hall again in the later 'Twenties chapter.

The coming of the jazz age, as the immediate post-war era became known, was not the signal for all straight string-dominated dance bands of no par-

Noble Sissle and his Sizzling Syncopators in London, 1929.







titular name to fold up and depart, as it were. Out in the west, in the St Francis Hotel in San Francisco, there was an orchestra that played dance music with a new and unmistakable sound. It was led by Art Hickman, composer of *Rose Room*, a melody which has remained a favourite for over fifty years. His orchestra had a small string section, but it also had something which was unknown at the time: a saxophone section. There had been a very successful sextet known as the Six Brown Brothers (led by Tom Brown, and the other five were not his brothers nor were they related to each other), touring the vaudeville houses of the United States after their resounding "hit" in a Broadway revue called *Chin Chin* in 1914. This band consisted of every kind of saxophone from soprano to bass, and no other instruments whatever. Considering the limited amount of tone-colour and rhythmic possibilities of such a constitution, they enjoyed a remarkably long run of fortune, for though they made their last record for a major label (Victor) in 1920, they were still touring with some acclaim until 1925.

Top left: *The Original Dixieland Jazz Band in action at Hammermith Palais de Dance, 1920.*

Left: *Joseph C. Smith and his orchestra at the Hotel Plaza, New York, 1919.*

Above: *The Six Brown Brothers, 1916.*

But their mellifluous sound, anchored to a rather stertorous bass saxophone – one of their best-known numbers was the aptly-titled *Bull Frog Blues* – was not particularly conducive to dancing; it took Art Hickman, and his saxophone team that included the late Bert Ralton and Clyde Doerr, also later to become bandleaders, to bring the possibilities of the instrument solo and *en masse* to the notice of the public and recording managers.

Art Hickman came east to New York in the summer of 1919, and in the late autumn of 1920, five of his men visited London, playing as Art Hickman's New York London Five in the ballroom of the Criterion Roof Garden, Piccadilly, affectionately known to its patrons as "the Cri." With an alto saxophone replacing the clarinet, the instrumentation was otherwise identical to that of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, and the sound, though lacking the superb élan of the ODJB, was reminiscent of that group in its more mellow mood. (That Dixieland jazz was definitely not all speed and noise is proved by the *pianissimo* passages to be heard on the band's records of such numbers as *I've Lost My Heart In Dixieland*, *Alice Blue Gown*, and *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles*, the last two being in waltz time but still recognizable as jazz!) The Dixielanders had returned to America in July, 1920, and London

was ready to hear whatever else Uncle Sam could offer; the New York London Five remained in London as a group for a year, their pianist, George Fishberg staying for a further nine years, directing his own band in the Kit-Cat Club in 1926 and a group recording as The Rhythm Band for HMV during the same period. Saxophonist Jack Howard, ex-US Navy Band flautist, commuted back and forth across the Atlantic as few other musicians of the day did, and was last heard of in 1933 leading a band in London's Olympia Ballroom.

The use of wind instruments for dance music in intimate night-clubs and larger ballrooms alike was virtually unknown before the coming of the Dixieland Band. As we have seen, Jim Europe and Joseph C Smith relied heavily on their string sections, and London's most popular dance bands prior to 1919 were the Savoy Quartet, playing in the Savoy Ballroom after a successful three-year sojourn in Murray's Club, and Ciro's Club Coon Orchestra. Both these groups consisted basically of two banjos, piano and drums, though the Ciro's band included other plucked instruments, and a string bass (this is completely inaudible on the records, which included the first recording in England of the famous *St Louis Blues*, in the autumn of 1917). The Ciro's band were of course all-negro, as were the Versatile Three and Versatile Four, which played successfully at Romano's in the Strand in 1910 and preceded the Savoy Quartet at Murray's in 1913. The clanking battery of banjos, supported by a veritable fusillade of drumming, makes for difficult listening today; the Versatile groups are

perhaps a little easier on the ear, as they lived up to their name by using a 'cello and latterly a saxophone, in addition to which they did not inevitably use a vocalist as the Ciro and Savoy bands did. (The Ciro's vocalist was a man named Seth Jones, and neither his diction nor the primitive acoustic recording are of the slightest help in determining the words of the songs he sang; the Savoy Quartet fared better in this respect inasmuch as their vocalist, Joe Wilbur, also the lead banjoist, possessed a penetrating tenor voice that, correctly placed in the recording room, comes across more than half a century with remarkable clarity.)

All the performances of these bands were very much of a muchness; hear one, hear all. The Savoy Quartet formula was usually a verse, a chorus sung, a verse sung, another chorus sung, a chorus played, and that was all. Such variations as could be worked on this limited pattern would occasionally appear in the recorded performances, but for the most part, the Quartet's records are of historic, rather than musical interest, and some show just how such standards as *After You've Gone* and *The Darktown Strutters' Ball* sounded at the time of their publication over half a century ago.

At the same time as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band's brilliant variations on popular songs (including the *Darktown Strutters* epic) and best of all, the creations of leader Nick LaRocca's fertile imagination were fascinating the flappers and their escorts, another American organization, many times the size of the Dixieland Band, was attracting audiences to the Philharmonic Hall in Wigmore Street, London. This was



a concert band known as the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, directed by Will Marion Cook. They did not claim to be a dance band, although six of their number under the nominal direction of one of the drummers, Bennie Peyton, played for dancing for a season early in 1920 in the Embassy Club. The only records this band made were rejected as being unsuitable for issue; the full orchestra made no records at all by which we can judge them, so far as is known, but it became famous through an article by the late Ernest Ansermet, Swiss-born conductor of the Suisse-Romande Orchestra, praising the ability of one of the principal saxophone and clarinet players in the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, Sidney Bechet. Predicting that Bechet's way was "the highway the whole world will swing along tomorrow," Ansermet showed unusual accuracy of foresight as well as breadth of taste at a time when most of his colleagues in the world of serious music were condemning "jazz" as the invention of the devil, etc. Bechet lived to the age of 62, dying in Paris on May 14, 1959, respected not only as a jazz musician *par excellence* but as the creator of some original music for a ballet, *La Nuit est une Sorcière*. Several of his colleagues in the Southern Syncopated Orchestra were considerably less fortunate. Travelling to Dublin to play some concerts there, their ship was in collision in a fog in the early hours of October 9, 1921, and several of their number were drowned. Bechet was home in New York by then; he had been deported for some alleged misconduct involving a casual girl friend.

For some years it was believed that half a dozen sides, including LaRocca's world-famous *Tiger Rag*, issued by Edison Bell under the name of the Southern Rag-a-Jazz Band, were by the Southern Syncopated Orchestra. In fact, they were by a group of students from an American university, white men who played successfully for dancing in (amongst other places) the Hammersmith Palais de Danse. This huge ballroom had been opened on November 28, 1919, with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band providing the music (and Bennie Peyton's Jazz Kings had appeared there too at the same time). Later had come another semi-Dixieland band, Billy Arnold's Novelty Band, which had gone on to Paris, somewhat increased in size from its original six, and played there with great success for several years. The Novelty Band used a saxophone and a clarinet, whereas the Dixieland Band used clarinet only and the Art Hickman Five a saxophone only. The Arnold sound was thus an interesting combination of both timbres, but the phrasing of the trumpet is jagged and jerky, quite different from the smooth but driving attack of Nick LaRocca.

LaRocca tells us that his music was, as he put it, "a conversation of instruments," where he and Larry

Shields, the lanky clarinettist, would "converse" *ad lib* on the "subject" of the melody, the trombone player (originally Eddie Edwards, replaced for the British trip by Emile Christian) supplying the rôle of chairman and adding such comments as might from time to time be felt necessary. Pianist J Russel Robinson (replacing Henry Ragas, who as we have noted, died just before the band was due to sail for England) and drummer Tony Spargo kept the ball rolling. Robinson was a ragtime composer of considerable ability; he was still a teenager when his first rag was published, and his popular songs such as *Margie, Singin' The Blues, Aggravatin' Papa, Mary Lou and A Portrait Of Jennie* are still well remembered. His wife found the climate of a London autumn more than her asthmatic condition would stand, however, so Robinson left the band in October, 1919, to be replaced by Billy Jones, a genial and gifted English pianist whose banjo-led quartet had played in various clubs including those at which the Dixielanders were to be heard. He thus had absorbed the new idiom at first hand, and a better substitute for Russel Robinson could hardly be imagined. When the five appeared on the low dais that served as a bandstand in the Hammersmith Palais, they could barely be seen – or heard – above the immense crowd that paid their 3s. 6d (17½p) or 5s. (25p) to dance to the compelling new music that poured from the horns. Thus the three wind players took to pointing their instruments at the ceiling as a matter of necessity, and to make sure everyone knew who they were, each wore a white top hat with a letter of the word D-I-X-I-E on it. Billy Jones tells us that he was the only member



Left: The Savoy Quartet at the Savoy Hotel, London, during the first war.

Right: Sidney Bechet.





Bevy Kruger (centre) and his orchestra; he was a pioneer "saxophone technician", 1920.

were in John Tait's Orchestra in San Francisco. Grofé and Whiteman set down the figures of musical speech they required their colleagues to play; they were all readers, so there was none of the happy-go-lucky Dixieland approach of everyone memorizing what Grofé played from a new song sheet, and then going away to play it differently every time. They played what Grofé had prepared, and as Whiteman, by now reverted to violin as being (he thought) more suitable to jazz than the viola (in which he was probably right, though neither are particularly suited to the idiom) gave them the down-beat, the Paul Whiteman Orchestra in its pristine form cut into some popular tune of the moment, such as *Tell Me or Nobody Knows And Nobody Seems To Care*.

The band gained popularity from the first night it appeared in the Alexandria, December 22, 1919. Within six months, Whiteman had led his band east to play in the very exclusive Ambassador Hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey. This is the state where stands the city of Camden, home of the then Victor Talking Machine Company, and in the recording room of that august concern that three years earlier had given the world the first published record of the

Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Paul Whiteman and his Ambassador Orchestra – so-described on the labels – made a test which passed Victor's selection committee with flying colours. Oddly enough, the number chosen as a test was not a popular song of the day, but a weird and rather repetitive tune put together by three members of the band as it had been constituted in Los Angeles: Henry Busse, the cornet player of direct German descent, trombonist Buster Johnson, who had remained in Los Angeles when the band came east and whose place was taken by genial Sammy Lewis, still alive and well as far as I know, and the late Gus Mueller, a clarinet player from New Orleans who left Whiteman in disgust a few months later because, he said, "you boys can't play no blues worth a damn." He was right, of course; the number in question was called *Wang-Wang Blues*, and the title, like the word "jazz" itself, had obscene connotations in some quarters of American society at the time. Whiteman himself did not play on this record; it is rather a heavy performance, though Mueller's own contribution is strictly from Dixie. The first record issued by the full band was an instant success. It coupled two of the most popular numbers of all time, *The Japanese Sandman* (by Richard A Whiting) and *Whispering* (by John Schonberger). The latter title featured a solo on the Swanee whistle, also perhaps



Paul Blase and his Novelty Orchestra, 1919.

more accurately known as the slide-whistle, and it seems to have played quite a part in selling the record. The total number of copies sold by the time it was withdrawn from circulation five years later was 1,302,923 in America alone; it was a colossal success in its original form all over the world.

Victor had hardly expected anything quite like this, from an untried artist. This was challenging the astronomical sales of such well-established artists as the great tenor Enrico Caruso and the Sousa Band. Even the Dixieland Band three years earlier, and at intervals since, had not reached these proportions, great though their sales had been. The first Whiteman record went on sale as America went to the polls to disown the Democratic President Woodrow Wilson and elect instead the hard-line Republican Warren Gamaliel Harding, who in his inaugural address the following March promised to keep America out of European affairs and the League of Nations, the brainchild of his predecessor. As sales of the Whiteman record mounted without the advantage of either radio or television to help promote it, the Victor management decided this was what its future policy would be; to record as much music as it could that bore any resemblance to the Whiteman style.

Already, when Nick LaRocca led his men back to the Victor studios for the first time since their return

to New York, he was told to record only popular songs of the time. The Dixielanders, accustomed to playing these as described earlier, did their best with Russel Robinson's *Singin' The Blues*, a pseudo-Oriental number of the kind very popular just then, called simply *Sphinx* (which they had recorded in London with great success) and a new Irving Berlin ballad, *Tell Me, Little Gypsy*. Evidently Victor's selection committee did not like what they heard; the records were rejected. The subsequent success of Paul Whiteman's first record must have prompted Victor to insist on a sweeter approach to their music from LaRocca's men. With the addition of a free-lance saxophonist named Bennie Krueger, the band made *Margie* and a little-known commercial number called *In The Dust* towards the end of November, but still it wasn't right. When *Margie* was re-made a week later, a satisfactory master was obtained and records by the hundreds of thousands were made from it. It is barely recognizable as by the band that had electrified London less than two years earlier. Subsequent records by the band had quite good sales, some of them foretelling the coming of the jazz soloist extemporizing against a rhythmic background, in this

case usually Larry Shields on clarinet, but public taste was veering away from what the Victor publicity department afterwards called "Simon-pure jazz," and after the end of 1921, only four more sides were made by the Dixieland Band – and these were for OKeh, a company that had switched to conventional laterally-cut grooves for their products and which was enjoying a boom in vocal blues records made by negro artists for the vast negro market. Friction within the band, dissatisfaction with bookings and disappointment at public reaction contributed to a breakdown in Nick LaRocca's health; in January, 1925 he washed his hands of the whole music business, turned the management of the band over to drummer Tony Spargo, and went home to New Orleans to devote his time to demolishing old buildings and constructing new ones on the sites.

The nearest comparable success on record prior to Paul Whiteman's had been that of another pseudo-Oriental number still remembered today, *Dardanella*. Every label carried a version of it in its catalogue, and it made a fortune for its negro composer Johnny S Black, but he committed suicide some years later without having written any further numbers of similar quality. The Victor record of this was by a so-called "novelty-orchestra" directed by a nineteen-year-old violinist named Ben Selvin, who at seventeen had a band in the smart Moulin Rouge night-club in New York. There is nothing obviously novel about the band or its record of *Dardanella*, which sold close on a million copies in five years; the number is taken at a pleasantly relaxed jog-trot rhythm, a xylophone is heard at intervals, and the saxophonist, a famous virtuoso named Nathan Glantz, emits a mocking laugh on a descending scale just before the end. It was customary in those days to use the term "novelty" as a mild sales gimmick; Art Hickman's New York

London Five were so described, and so was a band built on similar lines, under the direction of saxophonist Paul Biese. This was based on Chicago, but played a season in New York at the turn of 1919 and 1920, making many records that relied for their rhythmic impetus on the vigorous banjoist's contributions. Biese composed several minor successes, and after his return to Chicago in 1920, took up an offer from the College Inn there. He seems to have stayed in the Windy City until his untimely death in 1923, while still in his twenties.

Chicago at that time was beginning to justify its reputation as "hell with the lid off." Prohibition, the great social experiment that banned the sale of all kinds of intoxicating liquor within the United States and only succeeded in maiming, blinding or killing many who tried to evade its strictures by imbibing lethal home-made concoctions, had come into force as from July 1, 1919. The gang mobs beloved of many film script writers were beginning to feel their power as bootleggers (who by various methods obtained limited quantities of real liquor which they proceeded to sell at extortionate prices) and such was this power that they gained control of most of the places where bands played for dancing – and where liquor would normally have been sold openly. It was a hard life for musicians who had to play the music the lawless bosses demanded (strangely, this was often very sentimental), but they evolved a style of playing jazz-dance music that has long been known as "Chicago Style," usually employing a rather strident, sour tone for the brass and clarinet, a rough, coarse tenor saxophone sound, and a vigorous rhythm, strictly on the beat. The tenor sax frequently replaced the trombone. The early Chicago bands that played in the best ballrooms and hotels, however, bore an extraordinary likeness to Paul Whiteman's; as early as September, 1920, the



famous Benson Orchestra of Chicago made its first records, using the same instrumentation as Whiteman, but playing with a "hotter" (ie more vigorous, meaningful) attack, as might be expected. Edgar Benson was a band agent who liked to think of himself as a 'cellist. As far as is known, he never made any records, but the story is told that one night he went along with one of his bands to a ball being given by a leader of Chicago society. Anxious to impress, he brought his 'cello, and played it - with gloved hands, as it was a bitterly cold night. The leader and director of the Benson Orchestra on the stand in the Marigold Gardens ballroom, and at the many recording sessions for Victor undertaken between 1920 and 1922 was Roy Barge, later pianist, arranger and assistant director in Paul Whiteman's band, and until his retirement a few years ago, accompanist to Jimmy Durante.

Roy Barge was a fine ragtime pianist and composed many delightful numbers in that idiom. He parted company with Benson at the end of 1922 and for a little more than a year he ran his own band in Chicago; then in March, 1924 he joined one of the other principal dance bands there, under the leadership of the tenor saxophonist and songwriter Isham Jones, whom we shall meet and discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. Jones disbanded his famous unit in 1926, but formed another later; Barge joined Whiteman on February 1, 1928 and remained with him until 1940.

Two of the more unlikely products of Chicago, as it was in the early 'twenties, were the bands of Wayne King and Thelma Terry. Wayne King was a saxophonist who composed *The Waltz You Saved For Me*, some years later, and became known as "The Waltz King." His saxophone tone was lush, full, over-ripe, charged with emotion and the exact opposite of the clean, tangy sound of the great saxophonists who created the original Chicago style. He first came to fame as a member of the saxophone section of a large dance orchestra under the direction of Albert Short in the Tivoli ballroom, and later on with Dell Lampe's Orchestra in the Triannon Ballroom. One of King's most successful records was a seductive bolero called *Speak Easy*. He formed his own band in 1929 and continued to appear with it until the war years.

Thelma Terry was not only a remarkable musician in Chicago in the 'twenties; she would have been so anywhere at any time, for while there were few enough girls in the band business (except the vocalists, "thrushes" or "chirrupettes" as they were often nicknamed), the number of girl bass players could easily be counted on the fingers of one hand without the thumb. Dominating them all was diminutive, petite Thelma Terry, whose Playboys at one time included drummer Gene Krupa - and they were all "boys"; there were no other women in the band at all.

(It is worth noting, while on the subject of the fair sex and dance music, that only two other bands of



any consequence were directed by women, both of them female throughout. These were Ina Ray Hutton and her Melodears, a straight commercial band of the 'thirties whose leader also hailed from Chicago and was at that time a teenager, and the English band directed by Ivy Benson during the second world war with considerable success. Both were as easy on the eye, provided the eye was masculine, as on the ear, and both were large groups; Thelma Terry's Playboys were nine strong and they offered dance music that ran the gamut from cleanly sweet to piping hot. Ina Ray Hutton's glamorous group made some short films and at least one full-length one - *The Big Broadcast of 1936* - and proved that anything the men could do, they could do at least as well.)

The Chicago dance band that has lived on in the memories of all who heard it in the USA at the time is Coon-Sanders' Original Nighthawks. It was formed in 1919 as a result of the meeting of two ex-soldiers, Carlton Coon and Joe Sanders, in a Chicago music-shop. Coon played drums, Sanders piano, and as with most early bands, their co-operative group was a small one compared with those that followed. (Even Whiteman and Barge led bands of only nine or ten

Left: *The Benson Orchestra of Chicago (Roy Barge, at the piano); they were Whiteman's greatest rivals in 1920.*

Above: *Paul Specht.*



THELMA TERRY
*and
her* PLAYBOYS

COLUMBIA RECORDING
ORCHESTRA

MANAGEMENT
MUSIC CORPORATION
OF AMERICA

NEW YORK

CHICAGO



musicians at the beginning.) The band did not record until the spring of 1921, and until a contract with Victor was signed in 1924, there were no regular visits to any recording studio. This part of their story belongs to Chapter 3, but they deserve a mention here in view of their having pioneered modern dance music well within the era covered by this chapter.

They also reached a wider public than many bands of their day by their frequent broadcasts from the Hotel Sherman, where they were installed for many years. The pride of place as the first American dance band to broadcast, however, goes to the late Paul Specht. On September 14, 1920 he led his orchestra in a programme of dance music from WWJ Detroit, one of the first radio stations in the world. Specht was a violinist, classically trained and thus well-versed in the art of concert music, but he was also a good business man, and saw the possibilities of post-war dance music early. He formed a small group, and over the years gradually expanded it along what became conventional lines. His story too belongs more properly to Chapter 3.

I mentioned earlier in this chapter that the saxophone – usually soprano or alto – was the symbol of what the layman, both in America and Britain, thought of as a “jazz” band. Sir Noël Coward, in his brilliant number *Dance, Little Lady*, refers to the saxophone giving a wicked moan; Jerome Kern, some years earlier, in a number called *Dancing Time* which was the principal success of a show called *The Cabaret Girl* at the Winter Garden Theatre, London, in the

autumn of 1922, makes his hero sing about “where all the saxophones moan,” though the portamento effect to which, presumably, these quotes refer was not an essential feature of saxophone playing during the early ‘twenties. (It was much more a vogue in the early ‘fifties, as popularized by Billy May and his Orchestra; it was then known by the rather distasteful term “slurping.”)

However that may be, the saxophone was the *ring queen* of most dance bands during the period covered by this book. One of the most popular of the small groups centred round it was the All Star Trio, led by alto saxophonist Wheeler Wadsworth, and completed by Victor Arden, later to become a band-leader in his own right, at the piano, and George Hamilton Green on xylophone. It made scores of records for almost every label in New York between 1918 and 1922, some of the later ones being augmented by a brass section and a violin, but it seems to have been a vaudeville act rather than a dance band appearing as such in cabaret or in a dance hall. Another, perhaps more important unit was the Palace Trio. This was led by the greatest saxophone technician of his time, Rudy Wiedoeft, and like the All Star Trio, it made records for most of the major labels in New York, but for a somewhat shorter period of time, beginning in 1919, when J Russel Robinson, its pianist, arrived home in New York after his brief sojourn in London with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. The third member of the Palace Trio was a brilliant exponent of the piano-accordion, Mario Perry, who later joined Paul Whiteman as a featured soloist on that instrument and as a member of the violin section. He was killed in a car smash while the Whiteman Orchestra was in California in the early

Left: *Thelma Terry*, “the petite mistress of the string bass” (1908).

Above: *The All Star Trio* “who will make you want to dance” (1919). (Victor Record Catalogue)



The Palace Trio.

summer of 1929. Until that time, the piano-accordion had only one player who could make it play dance music to which it was possible to dance by reason of the rhythmic impetus with which he played: Pietro Deiro. He was principally a concert artist, however; Perry could do anything Deiro could do, but seemed more at home in dance bands.

Another early saxophonist who became a star performer, and who was also a great showman – he is credited with being able to smoke a cigarette and play his instrument simultaneously, though it seems hardly likely that such a procedure would benefit either the saxophone or its music – was Bert Ralton. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, he was an outstanding member of Art Hickman's Orchestra, and when Hickman returned to California after his New York engagement, Ralton stayed on there and became the featured attraction of the band in the Vernon Club. (He also played oboe, one of the pioneers of this little-used instrument in the dance-band world.) The pianist was a young man named George Gershwin, then enjoying the taste of success with a number called *Sissies* which Al Jolson featured in his act at the time (1920). The chances of hearing what one of the most gifted popular-music composers of the century sounded like as a dance-band pianist are forever denied us, however, as the handful of

records he is known to have made with the Vernon Trio were never issued, although two sides by what was called the Vernon Club Orchestra, made a few months later for Columbia, were put on sale and were very successful. Whether or not Gershwin took part is not known; the piano is barely audible, but the principal "voice" is a saxophone that could easily be Bert Ralton's.

One of the most popular ballrooms in New York during the 'twenties was the Roseland, at 51st Street and Broadway. Its policy as a rule was to employ two bands, and the élite of New York's dance and jazz musicians played there in various organizations at one time or another. The resident band for many years was directed by a small but resilient musician named Sam Lanin, whose roster of employees over the years included most of the well-known names, many of them becoming bandleaders themselves. Sam Lanin was born in 1888, and as a youth suffered a severe illness. His doctor told him that if he led a very quiet life, he might live to forty or so. Lanin's answer was to continue with his musical studies; he learned the clarinet and was proficient enough to be able to join Sousa's Band. When the jazz craze started, he organized a dance band more or less on the lines of Whiteman and Hickman, in that it had sections of brass, reed and strings, with the usual rhythm of piano, banjo, brass bass and drums, and actually recorded before Whiteman or the Benson pioneers! He also organized many smaller groups, specially for recording, and using variations on his own name (Sam C Lanin, sometimes just Lanin – misspelled "Lenin" on one English issue!) and all kinds of pseudonyms, some of them as colourful as the names adopted by present-day "pop" groups, he dominated the dance record market throughout the 'twenties. In 1931, he decided to retire, having made a fortune, it is said, out of records, quite apart from his work in the Roseland Ballroom and later on, on radio advertising such products as Ipana toothpaste. The band employed for this was known internationally as the Ipana Troubadours, and the photograph shows them dressed as bullfighters for some obscure reason. To collectors of personality records, one Ipana Troubadours issue is of considerable interest, as the anonymous vocalist on *Rose Of Mandalay* and *I'll Get By As Long As I Have You* was Bing Crosby, borrowed by Sam Lanin from his colleague Paul Whiteman. Lanin used Bing again a month later (in January, 1929), recording three titles under the name of Sam Lanin's Famous Players. These are *Susianna*, *I'm Crazy Over You* and *If I Had You*.

Earlier in the chapter, mention was made of Ben Selvin, in connection with the best-seller *Dardanella*. This remarkable musician had made 5,000 titles by

Top right: *The Ipana Troubadours (1928)*; they advertised toothpaste and were even good to dance to.

Bottom: *Sam Lanin's Famous Players (Atlantic City 1928)*.





the time he was twenty-five, and like Sam Lanin, appeared on dozens of different makes of record under a bewildering variety of pseudonyms. His style was less jazz-flavoured, but his work met with no less favour, and he too used many famous musicians, both for recording and public appearances. His records appeared first on Victor, then Brunswick, and eventually Columbia, for which firm he was Musical Director for several years. He also broadcast on station WOR New York, and until his recent retirement he was an Artist-and-Repertoire Manager for RCA.

At the outset of this chapter, we saw how the "revolutionary" American Dixieland Band came to England in 1919 and played, amongst other places, at the Embassy Club in New Bond Street, London. This had opened in 1919, and after the Original Dixieland Jazz Band had returned home, one of the most famous British bands of all time played there. This was under the direction of London-born, American-trained Bert Ambrose, best-known by his surname (and "Ammie" to his friends). The proprietor of the Embassy, one Luigi, discovered Ambrose in New York in 1920, where he and his American orchestra had opened the famous Palais Royal. At Luigi's suggestion, Ambrose returned to London; his place at the Palais Royal was taken by Paul Whiteman on October 1, 1920, his season at the Ambassador Hotel in Atlantic City having ended. Trade advertisements of that day recommend a number called *The Yodel Dodel Doh!* and to substantiate its undoubted excellence, potential

Above: Selvin's Novelty Orchestra enjoy rehearsals.

[Victor Record Catalogue 1920]

Right: Ben Selvin and his Orchestra some years later.

customers were assured it was being featured by Art Hickman's New York London Five; the Versatile Three; Bennie Peyton's Jazz Kings – and Ambrose's Orchestra at the Embassy Club. As far as is known, no records of Ambrose's first British band were ever made, nor of either of his American units, for he went back to New York in 1922 for a time and directed the musical arrangements at the Clover Gardens, but again Luigi persuaded him to return to the Embassy.

Ambrose's story belongs more to the ensuing chapters; of all British bandleaders, he is perhaps the one with the strongest musical ties with America, for he employed some of the finest American talent during practically the whole of the period covered by this book. Because his band played in only the most exclusive resorts, however, it was not until the coming of radio, and even some time after that, that his name became known to the public generally. Ask anyone who was adult during the 'twenties and not senile today which British bandleader's name springs most readily to his or her mind when that decade is mentioned, and the overwhelming likelihood is that it will be that of the late Jack Hylton.

Whereas Ambrose was, and by reason of his use of American musicians, still is well known among transatlantic dance-music connoisseurs, Jack Hylton made



somewhat less impression there. His band never played in the States, although rumour had it that an American tour was imminent many times during the 'thirties. He used mainly British, and during the late 'twenties and 'thirties, Continental musicians.

Jack Hylton began life in Lancashire in 1892, son of a cotton factory worker and a school-teacher. His musical education was restricted to twelve piano and singing lessons, but he appeared as a boy in almost every aspect of show business from opera to revue, from pierrot shows to pantomime, and even played the organ in a Stoke Newington cinema when this form of entertainment was very much in its infancy.

After his service in the first world war, he joined a small dance band named the Queen's Dance Orchestra after its venue, The Queen's in Langham Place, London, where it played for dancing in the roof garden. Hylton was only the second pianist, but in 1920 he assumed leadership, and in 1921, without his name being in the record catalogues or on the labels of the records, the Queens' Dance Orchestra made its first recordings. (These were for the fairly expensive HMV label, at 5s. a time; you could later often buy the same titles, such as *Cool Black Mammy* - one of the biggest successes in the sensational pierrot-show *The Co-Optimists* - on the cheaper Zonophone label, played by the same band under the name "Jack Hylton's Jazz Band.") Only a highly-trained ear could detect the infinitesimal differences, but the cost of the Zonophone was 3s. at that time.)

A photograph in *Sound Wave*, a British monthly magazine devoted to gramophone matters, shows the Hylton band to be made up entirely of white musicians, but a later one, evidently taken in the recording studio, includes a negro clarinet and saxophone player whose name was Al Jenkins. The earliest Hylton bands suggest a strange admixture of pastiche Dixieland and a following in the steps of Paul Whiteman; sometimes Hylton himself sang a vocal refrain, and was one of the first to do so, as hitherto dance records had no vocal work at all (if you wanted the words of a favourite song, you bought a vocal version to which it was not intended you should be able to dance, as it was presented in something approaching concert ballad style), or the occasional chorus was sung by a trained singer of the calibre of Ernest Pike, Peter Dawson or George Blaker. In America, the occasional vocal refrain in a dance record would be sung by the members of a select group of recording artists whose diction and experience before the horn made them acceptable for the work: Billy Murray, Henry Burr, Harry Macdonough, Lewis James, Arthur Fields and Irving Kaufman were among them. A vocalist from the ranks of a "jazz band," actual or alleged, was quite new in 1921, for it was widely believed that "jazz" musicians could neither read nor sing, that they were capable only of a furious noise, and though Jack Hylton's vocal work was not of the quality that would cause a Caruso or a Chaliapin any loss of sleep, it was personable, almost intimate, and it



lacked the studied approach of the "accepted" singers.

The immediate post-war era was ushered in by a reckless superficial gaiety that found expression in dancing to out-and-out jazz music, the only time during the so-called "Jazz Age" when this form, as subsequent connoisseurs understand the term, was a commercial success. Those who had contrived or managed to remain outside the claims of war welcomed the strange conditions of peace as a time of rejoicing for what was (they thought) to come in the New Era of eternal peace among the nations. Those who had suffered went dancing to forget their ghastly experiences, if they could afford it, and many could: the returning demobbed servicemen had their gratuities to spend, and spend them many of them did, in the haunts referred to earlier in this chapter. Many more, soberly thankful the war was over, tried to adjust themselves to the alarmingly high cost of living, and of these, a disquietingly large proportion were ripe for the implanting of the seeds of unrest by power-hungry Communists who saw the outcome of the revolution in Russia in 1917 as a prelude to what might be encountered in Britain. The result was a series of paralysing strikes, as well as demonstrations of violence. In an attempt to combat spiralling prices, the Coalition Government under David Lloyd George in England cut back on various forms of national expenditure, and large-scale unemployment set in during 1920. The dole queue became a familiar feature of the urban landscape.

It would not be right, however, to assume as many do, that the nineteen-twenties were a period of black gloom and unrelieved anxiety and unemployment such as has never been known before or since. It was a period of changing patterns of life on all sides, a settling-down after a major upheaval, and it had two unchallengeable qualities: the prevailing mood of the people, despite the unrest that surrounded them, was one of boundless optimism, as reflected in the most popular songs of the time, and it was the only decade this century so far when global conflict was impossible. This is not to suggest that the 'twenties was a period of international placidity of Halcyon virtues; at the outset, Russia was still convulsed by internal upheaval that at times seemed to threaten the security of Poland, and the ever-present Middle East cauldron appeared dangerously near to boiling over when Turkey and Greece collided in the autumn of 1922. It was pretty generally accepted, however, that with America in isolation, Russia busy putting her wrecked house in order and the rest of Europe exhaustively licking its wounds, peace – of a kind – was assured. As to the mood of the people, it is only necessary to thumb through the gramophone or music publishers' catalogues of the time to catch a clear glimpse of this. Leslie Henson had a number of cheerful resignation in a show called *A Night Out* at the Winter Garden Theatre in London: *It'll Be All The Same A Hundred Years From Now*, a slow marching song whose title



Left: *Best Ambrose* (1961).

Above: *Jack Hylton* (1923).

became a catchphrase of the time. Then from America, a year later (September, 1921) came Dorothy Dickson in a show called *Sally*, in which she sang one of Jerome Kern's most optimistic numbers, *Look For The Silver Lining* (he had made a similar hit with *Till The Clouds Roll By* in *Oh! Joy* early in 1919; it had been sung by a promising teenager named Beatrice Lillie). There was a number called *Humming* ("Keep on humming, although the skies are grey" – and just to ridicule the whole thing, the sun hardly seemed to stop shining all that wonderful summer of 1921, which for length and quality of sunshine fully deserved the term "golden"); and there was a trilogy of nonsense songs from the pen of Albert von Tilzer, one of America's foremost popular songwriters of the day, comprising in rapid succession *Oh By Jingo* (*By Gosh, By Gum, By Jee!*), *Chili Bean and Oh! Gee, Say! Gee, You Oughta See My Gee-Gee From The Fiji Isle*. The "jazz" bands featured all these and many more that have long since sunk without trace.

Earlier in this chapter, we saw that pseudo-Oriental numbers such as *Sphinx* and *Dardanella* were extremely popular; the imagined glamour of the mystic East made a great appeal to unsophisticated folk (though undoubtedly its appeal was considerably less to those who had newly returned from fighting in Mesopotamia and from service, perhaps less lethal



but grucelling nonetheless, in the eastern-most parts of the far-flung British Empire), and it seemed to make a similar impression on the American public, who welcomed these and other songs, such as George Gershwin's *Lanehouse Nights* (though of course this referred to the Chinese section of London), Harold Weeks' *Cairo and Hindustan*, and above all, Richard A. Whiting's *Japanese Sandman*, already remarked on as comprising one side of Paul Whiteman's first record. Built on the simplest and yet most appealing of melody-lines, both musically and lyrically it caught the mood of those who did not particularly want to whoop it up night in, night out in night-clubs, even if they could afford it. The gentle words, conjuring up a benign, almost Santa Claus-like character who would "trade new dreams for old," wedded to a gentle undulating tune, mark its creator as a minor genius. (Paul Whiteman was not the only outstanding personality to whom it brought fame and fortune, and who in turn made its composer wealthy: the late Nora Bayes, one of the most dramatic vaudeville artists to reach London from America, brought down the house with it, and soon it was heard everywhere, its un-

"Queen's" Dance Orchestra, 1921 (Jack Hylton leading at the piano).

ostentatious cadences making a contrast with the ebullient nonsense of *Oh! By Jingo* and the pre-fabricated nostalgia of *Swanee*.

It was Richard Whiting, too, who followed this little masterpiece with a song that I have chosen as the title for the next chapter, as it sets the mood for the period covered by it: *Ain't We Got Fun?* Both tunes are still heard today, *Japanese Sandman* having been taken by jazz musicians as one of their stocks-in-trade (and often mangled out of all recognition in the process), and *Ain't We Got Fun?* probably because the passage of fifty years has not altered the meaning of its ruefully light-hearted lyrics ("Not much money, oh! but honey, ain't we got fun?"). But whereas its appeal in 1921 was principally to young married couples – the verse refers to such – now in the 'seventies it is as likely to apply to middle-aged folk striving to come to terms with the dictates of a youth-dominated, youthfully affluent permissive society.

Ain't we got fun

The veteran American pianist, arranger, bandleader and composer Roy Bargy told me with quiet, but justifiable pride that his record with the Benson Orchestra of Chicago of *Ain't We Got Fun?* and that of *Wabash Blues* far outsold even Paul Whiteman's best-sellers for 1921. Well they might; both are played with subtleties of tone-colour and enticing rhythm that set a high standard for others to follow. The most famous record of *Wabash Blues*, however, was not the Benson Orchestra's but the contemporary version by another Chicago dance band, Isham Jones'. Jones had his teenage trumpet player, Louis Panico, play a dolefully bizarre series of figures during the refrain, in a manner suggesting an animal or even a human voice, sobbing hysterically. This record achieved success, even notoriety, through its having been used on stage in New York in a production called *Rain*. This dealt with prostitution, and seems to have caused as much of an outrage to the sensitivities of the ultra-conventional as such things as *Oh! Calcutta* did half a century later. The Jones record was not released in England; the Benson one was, and had a modest success. It was not a blues in the strict sense of the word, but it was in slow foxtrot time and used a sensuously dragging rhythm behind a sustained melody-line embodying a single note held over a bar twice in the first four bars, the same pattern being repeated throughout the entire refrain. As with many another popular song of the early 'twenties, *Wabash Blues* has passed into the standard jazz repertoire; it was a little ahead of its time, for the Blues as a dance form did not become really popular until 1923.

With the English speaking – not to mention the defeated German – nations in the throes of the first post-war depression, such songs as *Ain't We Got Fun?* provided a healthy outlet for the disillusion and disappointment of such conditions, an antidote for the cynics who sneered about "a land fit for Niggers to live in." Fortunately, these were relatively few; the majority of ordinary folk did their best to win the peace as they had the war, and to some it seemed an even more superhuman task. The sunshine of 1921, the end of "the troubles" in Ireland that had blighted

the opening two years of peace, and the dance bands all helped to sustain the optimism of the time. A new show at the Royalty Theatre in London coincided with Irish peace and the height of the long heat-wave: *The Co-Optimists*, with its all-British cast (apart from pianist and composer Melville Gideon, late of the Original American Ragtime Octet, who sounded as English as any of them) arrayed in pierrot costume and harking back to the seemingly distant days before 1914 with their sunny, family-type humour and tuneful songs. Among these were a British copy of the current American factory-fresh nostalgia, *Coal Black Mammy*, which had lyrics and melody that matched what was being imported from America so well that the USA took it to its heart, and Al Jolson featured in his show. There was also *If Winter Comes*, named after a best-selling novel by ASM Hutchinson, and continuing in its sub-title *Springtime Will Soon Be Here*. Jack Hylton's Queen's Dance Orchestra recorded both numbers and scored huge successes with them.

In the autumn of 1921, the management of the Savoy Hotel in London decided to install a full-sized, Whiteman-style dance band to replace the banjo-dominated Savoy Quartet that had departed a few months previously. Bert Ralton, late of Art Hickman's Orchestra and the Vernon Trio in America, had arrived in London and was offered the position of leader of this band. Its pianist was John Firman, whose place was later taken by Billy Mayerl, and it was known as the New York Havana Band, in deference to Ralton's previous experience in the Cuban capital with his own band before coming to London. The Savoy Havana Band, as it subsequently became known, was soon a firm favourite with patrons of the hotel, which in 1923 installed a second band in the ballroom under the direction of ex-Army bandmaster Deboy Somers. Tall, with much military bearing and a sound musical training, Somers made as much of an impact on his audience as Ralton had, though he was personally the very antithesis of Ralton. The Somers band was called the Savoy Orpheans, and its records, together with those of its Havana Band colleagues, were among the best-sellers of the time. The



Savoy Orpheans were early broadcasters, too: on October 3, 1923, they took part in a performance on the air from the studios in Savoy Hill of the British Broadcasting Company (as it then was). Another pioneer on the air was Marius B Winter and his Band, who had performed the unlikely miracle of playing to unseen audiences within three months of the commencement of broadcasting in Great Britain, the latter event coinciding with the General Election of November, 1922 when the Coalition Government was defeated and Bonar Law's Conservatives assumed office.

The Savoy bands were fashioned in the Whiteman mould, but there was no doubt that the latter was the top band in the world for dancing. Not only for dancing: eventually it became as much of a feature on the stage as in the ballroom, and in fact appeared in London in a revue at the Hippodrome called, topically, *Brighter London*. The Savoy Havana Band, however, had trod the boards well in advance of Whiteman in London: on March 13, 1922, it appeared as an act at the Coliseum.

The pioneer broadcasting band in America, under Paul Specht, also appeared in London in 1923 – opening Lyons' Corner House. The sensational feature of the band was the brilliant cornet work of Italian-born Frank Guarente, especially in the small "hot" group from within the ranks of the main Paul Specht Orchestra, which was known as The Georgians. (Their music was an extension, polished and modified, of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band's; Guarente owed much to his friendship with Nick LaRocca, but it was not called "hot" jazz in 1923. That name was not applied to the idiom until 1926 or 1927, in which latter year Guarente, after playing in Switzerland and other European countries as leader of Specht-based bands, revisited London and joined the new Savoy Orpheans under the direction of Carroll Gibbons.)

Paul Whiteman also featured a band-within-a-band, playing the commercial "blues" and "jazzier" numbers of the day. This was The Virginians, under the direction of his first alto saxophonist, Ross Gorman, who also played clarinet, bass clarinet and on occasion just about everything else. He was a superb musician, and universally popular with his colleagues in the business, but apart from his own playing and that of Sammy Lewis, the trombonist, there was little that the Virginians recorded that for sheer crispness and warmth could match the much superior Georgians. Henry Busse's solid, Teutonic trumpet work was not to be compared with the lithe, expressive, singing sound of Guarente's. Perhaps some of the latter qualities were due to Frank Guarente's having come early under the influence not only of Nick LaRocca,

but also of a negro cornet player from New Orleans, where Guarente had spent some of his tender years. This negro was Joseph Oliver, known to every jazz connoisseur over the last half-century as "King" Oliver, and with good reason. Oliver had been trained the hard way in the rough dance halls, street parades and open-air functions that traditionally were part of New Orleans life at the turn of the century, and he had developed a magnificent mastery of his instrument that had defeated all his rivals in his home city. He established himself in Chicago in 1918 along with many another New Orleanian musician, all of whom had heard along the grape-vine that the Windy City was very partial to real jazz, and had had very little since the Original Dixielanders had left for New York the year before. Oliver settled at the Royal Gardens (later called the Lincoln Gardens) with the band that most enthusiasts regard as the finest of its kind at that time, perhaps of all time. It swung; it played its music – not all of it out-and-out jazz in its origins, but it became so under Oliver's direction – with a warmth, yes, a fire, but a mellowness that even the primitive acoustic recording equipment of those days was able to catch and preserve. The quality of the band was improved still further in the summer of 1922 by the addition of a second cornet player in the person of Louis Armstrong, then a few days past his twenty-second birthday. Louis, of course, has since risen to international fame; hero of many world tours, countless films and broadcasts, records and TV appearances, he became universally recognized as the greatest jazz soloist of all, but he always modestly ascribed his success to the influence of the man he affectionately called "Papa Joe." The Oliver band eventually broke up, and though "King" Joe formed other units and played superb music with them, he never quite reached the heights attained by his original Creole Jazz Band. He died in poverty in Savannah in 1938, aged nearly fifty-three.

"King" Oliver's was not the only negro band to meet with success in America in those early years. In New York there was a young man from Cuthbert, Georgia, named Fletcher Henderson, who although trained as a chemist, had become a first-class arranger of popular dance music, leading his small group from the piano. He arrived in New York in 1920, and began working as staff accompanist to artists recording for the Black Swan label, which was owned by the music publishing firm of Pace & Handy, both of them negroes. After this company sold out to Paramount Records, Henderson began free-lance recording with most of the many blues singers in New York, for this was the era of the blues boom. A dance called the Blues had been invented; as might be imagined, it was slow, involved a good deal of bodily contact, and of course was regarded by the older generation as one more symbol of the degeneracy of the youth of the day. When it was made known that the Blues was originally the song of the negro, this served to substantiate

Opposite page: top left: *Billy Mayerl*.

Top right: *Isham Jones and his Orchestra*.

Bottom: *Bert Ralton and his New York Havana Band on stage at the Coliseum, 1922.* [Melody Maker

that belief. Here was proof, if any were needed, that we (ie the white races) were heading straight back to primeval jungle law. In fact, the Blues as danced presented a spectacle about as far removed from the popular idea of the jungle as anything could be; physical contact seemed to serve only to promote boredom of the most insidious kind, and a cartoon in *Punch* in 1923 had an American spectator at a society dance commenting, as he beheld the vacuous expressions of the participants: "Gee! wouldn't the Funeral March make just the cutest one-step!" Fletcher Henderson, however, when not playing accompaniments to genuine blues artists, was providing excellent dance music to the patrons of a cellar club called the Club Alabam; later he enlarged his band and took it to the Roseland Ballroom to play opposite Sam Lanin. By this time his brass section included Louis Armstrong, who promptly electrified New York's dance-band world with his "crazy jazz" inventions. It is interesting to speculate on the effect Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra might have had if it had visited London during the time Armstrong was in its ranks. As it was, London had to wait until July, 1932 before it could meet Louis in person, and then it was as a solo act supported by an indifferent negro band recruited in France. Henderson never visited

this country at all; quiet and unassuming, he directed his orchestra with efficiency and popularity, enhanced by dozens of records for many different labels and by extensive broadcasting, as well as tours of New England and the mid-West. In 1928, he suffered slight injury in a car accident, and from that point on he seemed almost to lose interest in the band, though he held it together for another thirteen years, during which time he had materially assisted Benny Goodman on the road to the throne of "the King of Swing," by providing exciting, but tasteful scores for speciality numbers, most of them either established standards or new tunes which he or his brother Horace, also a talented arranger, had composed. He died in 1952.

The most nationally famous dance band in America during the early 'twenties, however, next to that of Paul Whiteman was directed from the piano by Vincent Lopez, and it was engaged by the Pennsylvania Hotel in New York to play for dancing, and by Okeh records. The leader had been the pianist of Lopez and Hamilton's Kings of Harmony, a quintet based instrumentally on the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, that had had a modest success early in 1920; within two years he had formed his own somewhat larger band, conforming - as most of them did - to the Whiteman pattern. Like Whiteman's, the Lopez



band was a thoroughly musicianly, well-drilled unit; it may also be said that there was a Vincent Lopez Orchestra in existence longer than any other in the history of American dance music, for as recently as 1963, it was playing for dancing in New York's Hotel Taft. The specialty feature was the late Felix Arndt's *Nola*, a "novelty" piano piece that became Lopez's signature tune. His records were issued in England on the Parlophone label, and enjoyed considerable success, one in particular that caught the public fancy and the acclaim of the critics alike being an arrangement of Irving Berlin's famous waltz, *What'll I Do?* This featured a solo on a soprano cornet, an unusual instrument in any circumstances, though it is likely that while the beauty of its execution caught the perceptive critical ears, it was the tune itself that commended the record to the public. At all events, Vincent Lopez brought his orchestra to London in June, 1925, where it was to be seen and heard in something called *The Jazz Master* at the London Hippodrome, and in the Kit-Cat Club. It is interesting to note that the first violin in this orchestra was played by one Xavier Cugat. The smooth, velvety sound of Lopez's section-playing created quite a sensation, and in early works purporting to tell the story of "jazz" instanced this as evidence that jazz

was not the rowdy noise it was popularly supposed to be. The Lopez orchestra was not a jazz band at all, of course, and compared with the "hot" performances on record by other American dance bands of the 'twenties, it produced only a handful. In 1926, Vincent Lopez directed the musical arrangements in his own club, the Casa Lopez, which was a successful venture for several years.

I mentioned above that the Lopez "trade-mark" was a piano solo of considerable intricacy; but the performer was not alone in this field. Outstanding among the popular tunes, as distinct from songs, in the early 'twenties, was a raggy exhibition of dexterity for the piano called *Kitten On The Keys*. It was written by Zex Confrey, a "natural" pianist from La Salle, Illinois, who had taught himself to play before he had any lessons, it is said. He recorded his party piece, which became the despair of all aspiring dance pianists, on several labels, supported on the Victor (HMV) version by a small combination about which nothing is known, but which was probably a group assembled by the company specially for recording.

Left: Paul Specht and his Orchestra (1926).

Below: King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band (1923). Louis Armstrong kneels to play trombone!





Zee Confrey (1922).

Kitten On The Keys is hardly good ragtime, still less jazz, and its broken, precisely syncopated rhythmic patterns are not the kind one would have thought particularly inspiring as a dance accompaniment. Nevertheless, it has a certain period charm. In later years, Zee Confrey composed such tunes as *Dizzy Fingers*, *Nickel In The Slot* and *Buffoon*, all of which bear unmistakable family resemblances to the *Kitten*, and all enjoying very nearly as much popularity. (They and their famous predecessors were also attempted quite successfully by solo accordionists, to which instrument they could be readily adapted without making nonsense of their titles.) It is interesting to note that *Kitten On The Keys* was originally written as an experimental exercise for the piano, and that in 1924, a rival piece had to be written. It was called *Dog On The Piano*, by Ted Shapiro, later to become famous as Sophie Tucker's accompanist until her death at the age of 82 in 1966. Confrey also had other successes in *Tricks* and *Stumbling*, but he does not seem to have recorded them. That was left to Paul Whiteman and those who climbed on his 1922 model bandwagon.

There were many of these, as we have seen; yet despite their efforts to make what they thought of as jazz respectable, there was one band that continued to enjoy enormous public success by means of its appearances in such venues as the Balconades Ballroom at 66th Street and Columbus Avenue, New York City, and on scores of records. This was the Original Memphis Five, again following the Dixieland instrumentation of cornet, trombone, clarinet, piano and drums, but bringing a shade more sophistication to bear on its music so that it often sounded like a

slightly larger group. (For recording, as with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, it sometimes was — augmented by a saxophone, and frequently a banjo and even a brass bass.) Led by Phil Napoleon on cornet and trumpet, the Memphis Five — all from New York and near by — played popular tunes, blues and out-and-out jazz to the delight of the dancers who felt the need of more exhilarating music than the "symphonic" big bands offered. The quintet recorded for practically every label, frequently using other names, such as Ladd's Black Aces, the Cotton Pickers, Jazzbo's Carolina Serenaders and the Tennessee Ten, for which latter they really were double their normal size, but although anything such as spot improvising and memorized ("head") arrangements was difficult and scores had to be used, the Memphis Five-plus managed to sound as full of vitality as the basic group. Napoleon is a life-long admirer of Nick LaRocca, and often began or ended a solo with a phrase taken straight out of LaRocca's repertoire. The trombonists varied, but usually were Charles Panelli, late of the Louisiana Five, or Miff Mole, whose brilliant technique made him the outstanding dance-band trombonist of the decade. On clarinet was Jimmy Lytell, a teenage boy who had replaced Larry Shields with the Dixieland Band, the pianist was Frank Signorelli, also late of the Dixielanders, and on drums, Jack Roth, now and for many years manager of Jimmy Durante.

The records of the Memphis Five give little idea of the tremendous attack they used to put over their music; Roth was restricted to a cymbal and tap-box most of the time, as the primitive recording-horn simply could not cope adequately with anything more adventurous in the percussion department. Consequently the rhythmic impetus rested on Frank Signorelli, who can be heard doing a magnificent job at the keyboard. It says much for the musicianliness of the band and their understanding of the requirements of then-contemporary dance music that they were able to maintain their popularity right up to 1928, in the face of dance bands that were tending to become more and more like concert orchestras, getting ever larger and playing ever more involved arrangements.

Another band that blossomed out during the first few years of the decade was that of Ted Lewis, born in Circleville, Ohio, in 1890. His real name was Theodore Lewis Friedman, and he learned to play clarinet as a boy. He organized his own band as long ago as 1910, embarking on short tours around Ohio, which gave him a taste for the big-time. In 1917 he joined Earl Fuller's Jazz Band in New York, and was its principal soloist (see Chapter 1). In 1919 he launched out as leader of his own "Jazz Band" (using

Opposite page: top: Fletcher Henderson's Roseland Orchestra, New York 1925.
Below: Vincent Lopez and his Pennsylvania Hotel Orchestra, New York 1924.





several of Fuller's men) and, securing a Columbia recording contract that introduced his name and his music to Europe, he proceeded to evolve an original style of dance-band entertainment that never advanced much with the changing fashions, yet maintained a firm hold on the affections of both the American and the Anglo-European public for two decades. Like Vincent Lopez, Ted Lewis had his own club for a while (it was on Seventh Avenue, New York City); he and his band appeared in such revues as *The Greenwich Village Follies* and *The Passing Show*, and also like Lopez, Lewis appeared in London at the Kit-Cat Club in the summer of 1925.

The Ted Lewis brand of dance music was almost everything that the Lopez variety was not. One might say that Ted Lewis stamped his personality on his music with an indelible ink; strutting like a drum-major before his gaily-uniformed band, twirling his clarinet like a cane, a battered top-hat at a rakish angle on his head (when he wasn't juggling it up and down his forearm), frequently enquiring "Is ev-rybody happy? Yes sir!" and putting over the lyrics of his songs in a droll parody of a worn-out "ham" actor, and occasionally playing clarinet or alto saxophone in a manner that matched his vocal delivery, he produced what he described as "an enertainment" that swept its audience along despite themselves. When I said his style changed little over the years, that may seem to some connoisseurs to be an over-simplification of the facts; it is true that a Ted Lewis record of a sentimental number of the late 'twenties, something such as *Moonlight Madness (Then You Were Gone)*, is considerably smoother than, say, his 1921 record of *Bimini Bay*; but the basic concept is much the same, and though the later 'twenties saw several first-class "hot jazz" musicians, such as "Muggsy" Spanier on cornet, Jimmy Dorsey and Benny Goodman on clarinet (at different times) in the Lewis band, and occasionally they were allowed to play ageless solos, the early-twenties near-ragtime style was never far away, and this is particularly true of Ted Lewis's own playing.

Despite all this, his band at all times had an eminently danceable quality. It remained by normal standards a small band: four brass, two saxophones doubling clarinet (one being the leader himself), two violins, and the usual four rhythm of piano, banjo or guitar, brass bass, and drums. London had two opportunities of seeing and hearing the Lewis entourage in person, for it paid a return visit to the capital in the summer of 1930, exactly a year after filming *Is Everybody Happy?* in Hollywood. (In 1935 Ted Lewis and his Band was featured in a film called *Here Comes The Band*.) On both occasions, London welcomed the vivacious maestro and his band warmly. After the second London season was over, the band appeared briefly in Paris. Soon after, one of its earlier records

became established as providing the singing-off music for Radio Normandy. This was the waltz ballad *Goodnight*, recorded in December, 1927, but unaccountably not issued in England until the middle of August, 1929. It must have made a fortune for Irving Bibb, its composer, for it remained a "stayer" in the English catalogue for many years after all its contemporaries had been withdrawn. The combination of a distant, unaccompanied muted trumpet sounding the Last Post (or "Taps" as the US Army terms it) at the beginning and the end of the side, with Ted Lewis's relaxed, sincere-sounding spoken vocal in between, made it irresistible. It must be regarded as one of the best-selling dance records of all time. Ted Lewis died in New York City on August 25, 1971.

A band that in 1923 began a career that lasted over four decades was Guy Lombardo's Royal Canadians. Unlike many bands of the time that identified themselves with a certain locality, the nucleus of this was comprised of three brothers - Guy, Lebert and Carmen Lombardo—who really were Canadians, having been born and reared in London, Ontario. Guy, the leader, was born in 1908, and by the time he was sixteen he had made his first records (for Gennett, in Richmond, Indiana). These show the Royal Canadians to have been quite a "hot" little group, but by the time they came to make their next records, in Chicago in 1927, for Columbia, the style for which they became world famous was already set, and with rare exceptions, it was far from "hot".

Everything was drilled to a degree. The brass section, the saxophones and the rhythm played with a precision that would have done credit to a crack military band, but what they played was anything but military. The phrasing might have been as clipped as an order from a Prussian officer, but the tone of the saxophone section in particular was thick and sugary, calculated to inspire romantic moods among the patrons of the supper-clubs and hotels where the Royal Canadians played. They did a good deal of broadcasting, and one night, while on the air from the Granada, a restaurant on the South Side of Chicago, gang warfare broke out and one gunman was killed - accompanied by the syrupy strains from the bandstand. The shooting was heard by all who had tuned in to listen to Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians.

Strange as it may seem, this unit that typifies the acme of sweet-style dance music was for many years a prime favourite with Louis Armstrong, whose own brand of playing was the exact antithesis of Lombardo's. Vocalist Carmen, who also led the famous saxophone team, was a very able composer of popular songs, which of course received their first performances by the band. Many readers will remember *A Lane In Spain*, for example, *Last Night I Dreamed You Kissed Me*, *Boo-Hoo*, *Sailboat In The Moonlight*, *Ferdinand The Bull* and the band's signature tune, *Coquette*. All these of course appeared in much later times

than the period under consideration in this chapter.

Guy Lombardo was just one youngster in the early 'twenties who was bitten by the dancing craze. Every college in the Union had its resident band that played for social affairs on the campus. In those days, outwardly prosperous and peaceful, of course, young students did not stage protest-marches, demonstrations and other violent anti-social activities, nor did they introvertedly smoke drugs. Instead they channelled their natural surplus energy into organizing and taking part in dances, and from many of the amateur bands that provided the music, there came some first-class musicians.

One of these was a law student from Indiana University, christened Hoagland Carmichael, but known the world over now as "Hoagy," the man who gave us such classics of popular music as *Georgia On My Mind*, *Lazy River*, *Lazybones*, *Rockin' Chair*, *Washboard Blues* and above all, *Star Dust*. The last-named song, originally a fast stomp in the negro style, has been rendered by countless bands and soloists, instrumental and vocal, in the forty or so years since it was written. To begin with it had no words, but as it grew in popularity and dance bands began playing it more and more, slowing it down in the process, a lyric of sufficient strength was needed, and this was supplied in 1931 by Mitchell Parrish. Hoagy Carmichael was born in Bloomington, Indiana, on November 11, 1896, so that he was not a teenager at the time of his first involvement with jazz and dance music; but several members of another college band, from the North-Western University in Chicago were, and they were also friends of Carmichael's. Their cornet-player was a tall lad of nineteen in 1922, a boy completely sold on the music of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, by the name of Leon Bix Beiderbecke, known to all dance music and jazz enthusiasts simply as "Bix." He was a strange, introspective young man, whose music was far beyond anything anyone had ever heard, for its sheer inventiveness, charm, shape and undeniable good taste. When listening to a recorded solo by Bix, one has the impression that his rephrasing of the melody is exactly right, that there could never be a more suitable interpretation; then, on hearing a different record of the same title by the same band, with Bix playing his solo, it comes out entirely differently, and still sounds exactly right. No wonder Hoagy Carmichael was shattered when he first heard Bix play.

Alas! the young genius bloomed only briefly. Books and articles have been written on the subject of his work, his life and the circumstances leading to his death, on August 6, 1931, at the age of twenty-eight. The facts are that once he had made a name for himself with the college band (known as the Wolverine Orchestra), had recorded with this and even played in New York (at the Cinderella Ballroom), he was ready to be accepted into the ranks of a major dance band. He worked intermittently, but apparently

happily, as a member of the Jean Goldkette organization based on Detroit, eventually joining the Number One Goldkette band and playing in and around New York in this orchestra. When it was disbanded at the end of a successful year, finishing as a star attraction in the Roseland Ballroom in New York, Bix was offered a position in the Paul Whiteman brass team. He joined Whiteman in Indianapolis on October 31, 1927, and evidently determined to be worthy of what he considered, not without reason, was the highest musical honour that could be bestowed on him; but the music he had to play was much more exacting than anything he had attempted hitherto, the pace was demanding and the extemporized solos relatively few and far between. Caught up in such a life, with more money than he had ever dreamed of, plenty of prohibition liquor and an inborn inability to say "No" to anything or anyone who needed help or wanted to stand him a drink, Bix's health began to suffer, and with it, his playing. The frequent broadcasts that involved many new numbers, recording sessions that required constant repetition of the same title without any chance to improvise, the tours and concerts that were all part of the Whiteman routine demanded an outlet, and for Bix, it was alcohol. Twice he collapsed, twice he went home for a cure, until eventually, a friend of his tells me, he had to walk with a stick, too frail and broken to make even that simple effort unaided. When he caught pneumonia during the summer of 1931, there was no resistance left.

Such was Bix's eminence that I feel he deserves to hold up the chronology of this narrative; at the time of his meeting with Hoagy Carmichael at the outset of his career, Bix was a normal, healthy young man with a passionate love of music. He also admired the modern American composers Eastwood Lane and Edward McDowell, and played records of the music of Igor Stravinsky as often as he did those of his dance and jazz-music colleagues. He has been described as typifying his generation; certainly the free-and-easy music he - and they - played has left its mark on the era in which they played it, for whenever a film or television producer wishes to denote the early or mid-twenties by means of popular music, the free-wheeling style of the college bands, or a modern fake-up of it, is called in to perform this function. Paul Whiteman and Vincent Lopez may have been the biggest names in dance music in the United States at the time, but the hell-for-leather music of the lesser-known, even completely forgotten smaller units draws a picture of their times more clearly than any.

The most famous college band formed during the period between 1921 and 1923 was led by Fred Waring, then a student at Pennsylvania State College. It was originally a quartet, but by 1923 it had become an eleven-piece band that included men from nine other colleges. The band made a specialty of vigorous comedy numbers, not surprisingly those with a campus

flavour being given the full Waring treatment. The Waring band, known always simply as Waring's Pennsylvanians, was one of the first in America to feature vocalists from its ranks, and few indeed are its records without vocal work at all. The knockabout comedy bordered on the kind offered two decades or more later by Spike Jones and his City Slickers: reedy, romantic tenors contrasting with a rasping bass in a Bronx accent, and vigorous chorus work. (Some readers will probably remember such numbers as *Bolshevik, I Scream, You Scream, We All Scream For Ice Cream* and a feature song from the band's first film, *Syncope*, in 1929. This was *Jericho*, in which Fred Waring himself likened the ancient city that fell to the sound of trumpets, to the civilization of our own time that seemed under the spell of the trumpets in a dance band !)

Apart from Fred, his brother Tom, the band's first



Right: Hoagy Carmichael (c. 1927).

Below: Bix Beiderbecke (cornet) and his Rhythm Juglers recording in 1925.





pianist, was the most regularly featured vocalist; there were also drummer Poley McClintock, trombonist Clare Hanlon – a man – and trumpeter Nelson Keller. The members of the band changed but little over the years, compared with the constant shuffling that went on among the ranks of their contemporaries. For over twenty-five years past, Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians has been a large choral group, however, which still undertakes annual national tours under the direction of septuagenarian Fred.

Fifty years or so as a bandleader is an impressive record; it can be matched by that of a man who played no instrument, but who directed the fortunes of countless bands and artists, on records and on stage, on radio and in ballrooms and cabaret, in films and television, and who at this writing is still very much alive and active: Ed Kirkeby. One of his first, and certainly his most famous of all the bands he directed was the California Ramblers. Its members did not necessarily hail from California, and so far from rambling, they actually stayed in and around New York for the whole of their existence from 1921 to 1936. They had their own club, which was a favourite venue for musicians as well as ordinary patrons, the latter finding the band so fine an incentive for dancing that they became regulars and, it is said, were frequently on the friendliest of terms with the members of the band. The personnel list of men who played at one time or another with the Ramblers reads like a Who's Who of New York jazz and hot dance music, and some of their names will keep recurring throughout this book, which in view of their excellence, is as it should be. The first California Ramblers, however, was a somewhat undistinguished group, modelled on Whiteman (of course) which laid the foundations of fame for its name through its first recording being of a tune that became, and has stayed for half a century, a top hit: *The Sheik Of Araby*.

This was just another pseudo-Oriental melody, based on a repeated two-note phrase, composed by Ted Snyder, already well established in the New York music world as a songwriter and publisher, partner at

one time of Irving Berlin. The appeal of *The Sheik* was probably enhanced by the appearance on the silent screen of the great Italian heart-throb, the late Rudolph Valentino, in the title-role of a film of that name. The record, made in New York for Vocalion, was widely issued in England under a bewildering variety of fanciful pseudonyms, and its success paved the way for more by the same band. These were issued on almost every label except Victor, even the most "commercial" titles containing something to interest the connoisseur of good dance music and the professional and amateur musician alike. Early the following year (1922) a young man of eighteen named Adrian Rollini joined the Ramblers as a bass saxophonist who could also play xylophone, piano and drums! (He had made a number of piano rolls and was a proficient xylophonist and percussionist before he took up the bass saxophone, but it was with this, the largest member of the saxophone family, that he made his mark on the history of dance music, for none of the relatively few musicians who played this instrument during the 'twenties could approach the suppleness and subtlety with which Rollini manipulated it, with one exception, and that much later in the decade. This was Spencer Clark, who took Adrian Rollini's place when the latter took up a position as a member of one of the bands in London's Savoy Hotel in 1928. See Chapter 3.)

As if playing four instruments with complete mastery were not sufficient, Rollini had to invent others himself. Possessed of a sense of humour that seemed outrageous at the time, he built a tiny clarinet, so miniature that it could be accommodated in the breast-pocket, which he called his "hot fountain-pen." It had a range of about an octave, but its creator was able to coax some interesting music from it as a complete contrast to the rumbling sonorities of his most usual instrument. He also used a strange hybrid that

Top: Waring's Pennsylvanians (1925).

Right: Fred Waring (1938).

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Ray A. Johnson
1933-12



he called a goofus, which consisted of a body like a saxophone, complete with a bell that was there to further the illusion that the contraption was of the saxophone variety (remember that this was the era when saxophones of any kind were *de rigueur* in any dance band!). Connecting the body to the mouthpiece was a length of tube, and in the mouthpiece was a mouth-organ reed. By manipulating the keys, it was possible to produce a rather restricted, wheezy sound resembling a rather amateurishly-played mouth-organ, or even a distant reed-organ or harmonium with its deeper tones disregarded. This too lent a "novelty" effect to the performance by the band as a whole, and since enterprising leaders and bookers were ever in search of novelties, such things as "hot fountain-pens" and "goofuses" quickly caught the public fancy; but no musician who tried them ever achieved the effect of their inventor.

Adrian Rollini and his bass saxophone stood astride the California Ramblers, as it were, with a foot in the front-line, or melody section, and one in the rhythm. Although the Ramblers had a series of first-class trombonists, during the 'twenties at least they used no

Left: Adrian Rollini (1928).

Below: The California Ramblers (1927).



bass of the more conventional brass or string variety: Rollini's huge saxophone was all that was necessary, and he would bridge the gap between the trombone, the saxes and the rhythm almost simultaneously with a series of beautifully constructed phrases that not only gave an interesting and unique tone-colour to the band as a whole, but which were placed so masterfully as to make it swing, and so urge its listeners to dance. Aided by Stan King, probably the greatest drummer in American dance music apart from Chauncey Morehouse of Paul Specht's Orchestra (and later, Jean Goldkette's, during Bix's time), Rollini created exciting but always tasteful music that to this day maintains its appeal beyond that of pure nostalgia. It was a rare case of connoisseurs' music making an appeal to a public that was not usually attuned to or interested in the finer points of the art. After the "swing" vogue of the mid-thirties had established itself in popular esteem, Adrian Rollini laid his wind instruments aside, and proceeded to demonstrate that whereas before he was a more than competent drummer and xylophonist, he was now also a first-class exponent of the vibraphone, or amplified tubular dulcimer. He had experimented with it in the 'twenties, and from about 1936 onwards, he confined his whole attention to it, providing the music in his own night-club ("Adrian's Tap-Room") on this instrument, with the assistance of guitar and bass. It fitted the seductive requirements of the setting perfectly. After the second world war, Rollini retired to Florida, where in 1956 he met with a fatal car accident. He was fifty-two.

Although he was resident in London for two years (1928-1929), Rollini was by no means a pioneer American settler in the British capital. Unquestionably the longest established was a first-class negro trombonist and tap-dancer from Middletown, New Jersey, named Ellis Jackson. He had arrived in England in 1907 with his family who were a vaudeville act, and he decided to stay. Fifty-five years later, in 1962, I was honoured to meet this incredibly youthful veteran in his home in Sydenham, where he demonstrated his crystal-clear memory and rapier-wit, using records to help underline the points of his stories. He had joined the Southern Syncopated Orchestra on July 4, 1921, and when this was finally disbanded about a year later, he became a member of the first interracial dance band playing dance music in what was then the modern idiom. (The old Savoy Quartet had had a coloured drummer at one time, but as has been remarked, their music was far removed from the dance style of the inter-war years.) This band was led by a violinist of Hungarian descent named Victor Vorranger, and besides trombonist Jackson, who also sang vocals, the trumpet and drums were played by American negroes, while the alto saxophone, piano and banjo were in the hands of English musicians. Known as Victor Vorranger and his Broadway Band, or simply as The Famous Broadway Band, the unit

recorded for the small but vigorous Scala label, contributing to its catalogue a number of equally vigorous performances that make up in sheer high spirits and attack what they lack in finesse. A little later, and somewhat augmented by extra melody-line men, the Broadway Band recorded for Aco, among their number being a saxophonist named John Obregon or Oubrigant, who was also a negro.

Ellis Jackson recalled working with various other bands after the Broadway Band broke up and Vorranger built up a new group, then in 1931 he took a step that gave him a settled life for twenty years until he retired from music: he joined Billy Cotton's Band as trombonist and featured tap-dancer. He remembered the sensation caused in 1926 when Paul Whiteman came to London for the second and last time with his orchestra, and featured one of his trombonists, Wilbur Hall, in a highly technical display of nothing less than Vincent Lopez's signature-tune *Nola*, which of course was written for the piano. The fantastic co-ordination of lip, tongue and wrist demanded by this piece arranged for solo trombone brought down the house every time it was played (though it was never recorded by Whiteman); Ellis Jackson remembers he went home, picked up his trombone, sat down and repeated what he had just heard. Much is often made of how splendid it was that Louis Armstrong and others could record with white musicians in New York in 1929, and how musical integration of this sort was a step forward at that early date. Little or nothing has ever been published about the Anglo-American band that not only crushed the barriers of race but also of nationality in London in 1922.

There was another fine band playing in London that year and for some two years afterwards, one that had worked on the Mississippi riverboats of the kind that according to legend had helped to bring true jazz up from New Orleans to St. Louis and the mid-West. The band was the Original Capitol Orchestra, named after the steamboat line for which it had worked, and it played with great success in London's Rector's Club - where the Original Dixieland Jazz Band itself had appeared three years before - and in the famous Grafton Galleries in Regent Street. It also recorded a variety of excellent performances for the Zonophone label, on which it was carefully described as "American Orchestra." These ranged from sentimental waltzes to "low-down" blues, from exciting up-dated (and up-tempo) versions of numbers such as *Tiger Rag* to interesting - and non-vocal - performances of comedy material such as *When It's Night-Time In Italy It's Wednesday Over Here*. Little is known about the band, inasmuch as the personnel has never been fully identified, but their advanced style of playing makes their music interesting to listen to today. A trio from the main band, known as the New Orleans Trio, which sometimes consisted of four men (!) also recorded for Zonophone, and demonstrated what a pleasing variety of instrumental colour can be obtained

from three or four musicians with the right approach.

President Harding collapsed and died suddenly on August 2, 1923, and in a General Election held in Britain four months later, the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin was defeated. For the first time in her history, Britain had elected a Labour government, headed by the son of a Scottish crofter: James Ramsay MacDonald. Radio was fast establishing itself as the new mass-medium of entertainment, and many people shook their heads wisely and said that the gramophone industry was doomed. So-called "classical" musicians continued to fulminate against what they called "jazz," and in April that year, Mr (later Sir) Compton Mackenzie brought out a new monthly magazine he called simply *The Gramophone*. It represented something new in gramophone journalism, because it was filled with articles by authoritative critics and writers, leavened with a little humour; unlike its predecessors whose criticisms of the month's new records practically never reported that any record was anything less than eminently acceptable in its own way, *The Gramophone* stated flatly if a record had faults, but its critics were constructive as a rule, and each knew his or her subject thoroughly. The result was a balanced, readable periodical that flourishes to this day, even as its venerable founder himself does. Although it was designed mostly for the enlightenment of those whose taste ran to serious music, it was early recognized as policy to review the lighter side of things, and there has always been a section devoted to dance music (as long as there was any to which to devote it). Sir Henry Coward in public utterance called down the wrath of Heaven on those who enjoyed dancing or listening to "jazz" as he called it; in America, a famous article published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1921, headed "Unspeakable Jazz Must Go," tried to make the flesh of mothers of teenage daughters creep by describing the awful moral laxity due entirely to the craze for dancing, and in *The Gramophone's* "Letters to the Editor," a reader named Kaikhosru Sorabji persisted in writing at length, decrying any music that did not match exactly the standards he considered consistent with culture, civilization and advanced musical education. (When a famous operatic soprano sang *Disland* as an encore in the Royal Albert Hall, Mr Sorabji's prose reached new heights of obloquy.) The popular reaction to all this was to continue to dance to bands whose technical ability was ever reaching a higher level of musicianship, to buy the records they made, and generally to cock a snook at pedantry of this sort.

In Egypt, Lord Carnarvon and Mr Howard Carter and their team of excavators unearthed the unsullied tomb of the boy Pharaoh Tut-Ankh-Amen, and immediately his name became a household word both sides of the Atlantic. Paul Whiteman had a band – not his No 1 orchestra, but one of several he organized – on the newly-launched SS *Leviathan*, and this recorded a tune all dressed up in pseudo-Egyptian trappings,

named after the king who had died 3,500 years before, and almost started a new vogue for Oriental flavoured numbers. The Benson Orchestra of Chicago changed leadership and personnel: Roy Barge handed the direction over to another pianist, Don Bestor, whose arrangements showed his taste for jazz flavouring: he left plenty of scope in his scores for extemporized solos. One of his most outstanding musicians was a young saxophonist from Carbondale, Illinois, named Frank Trumbauer. He favoured the C-melody instrument, as many others of the time did, but whereas they switched to alto and/or tenor saxes during the next few years, Trumbauer remained faithful to his first love and has become the only virtuoso C-melody saxophone player in dance music. At a time when dance music was usually clipped and staccato in its phrasing, frequently jerky and still retained a good deal of the military flavour which had characterized it since the pre-Dixieland days of ragtime, Trumbauer's smooth, legato playing and advanced musical phraseology made him the most emulated saxophonist in the USA and as his records became known elsewhere, his work became at once the delight and despair of all who attempted to master the alto and C-melody saxophone. Many were the customers who bought the English HMV record of *Yes! We Have No Bananas* by a studio band known as the Great White Way Orchestra; very few at the time realized as they listened or danced to the lively number on the other side, *Think Of Me* by the Benson Orchestra of Chicago, that the strangely haunting saxophone that offered such a perfectly balanced paraphrase of the tune was played by a true creator in the idiom of modern dance music, echoes of which can be heard today in the playing of various leading saxophonists.

1923 was a year of crazy songs and sinister events. Italy's Fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini, having installed himself as Il Duce the previous autumn, made threatening moves against the Aegean island of Corfu; Adolf Hitler, the disgruntled ex-corporal in the Kaiser's army, tried to seize power in Munich at the famous "beer-cellar" revolution, and Japan was stricken by one of the most severe earthquakes of the century. *Yes! We Have No Bananas* was the principal hit song, vying with the question-and-answer nonsense of *Mr. Gallagher And Mr. Shean*, but the older generation found the alluring strains of the waltz *Three O'Clock In The Morning* more to their liking as suggesting the languorous dances of their youth.

Nevertheless, it was possible to sense that things were beginning, ever so slightly, to turn the corner away from wars and depressions – or so it seemed. The British Government had announced, a few years before, its intention to hold a huge exhibition to show the world that the British Empire had emerged more tightly-knit than ever from a terrible war, and in 1923 the foundations for this were being built in Wembley, a suburb of London that suddenly found itself rivaling the Valley of the Kings in Egypt as the focal point of



Rudy Vallée.

recorded as *La Petite Femme de Paris* by Mistinguett!) Perhaps one of the loveliest of all ballads of the 'twenties (and there were plenty, despite the prevailing taste for "hard-boiled" numbers) came from Rudy Vallée's imagination: *Deep Night*. Less well known, perhaps, as a Vallée number than some of the songs already mentioned, this original melody, with its leap in the first two notes of the refrain "from the basement to the attic" as one dance-band vocalist put it to me, remained in the repertoire of most "name" bands of the 'thirties and after, probably because its melodic and harmonic construction gives enterprising arrangers something with which they can work happily. Its composer also became famous during the 'thirties for his hilarious adaptations of such very British songs as *The Old Sow*, *Mad Dog And Englishmen* and *The Whiffenpoof Song*, which latter he recorded both in America and in London during a season in the spring and summer of 1937. It was based on a poem by Rudyard Kipling, and it outraged those to whom Kipling was a kind of deity whose every word was a sacred utterance, but Rudy Vallée and his assumed English accent scored a great success with all these. More recently he appeared in television, and has since entered the political arena.

As Rudy Vallée did not become a success until the 'twenties were nearly over, it may seem that to devote the opening paragraphs of this chapter to his work is out of order chronologically; but there can be no holding fast to strict order of events in a book of this kind, and Vallée was very much a product of America during the so-called Roaring Twenties – except that,

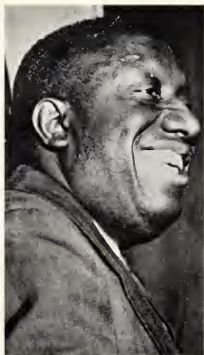
as we have seen, he did not have to roar to make his name. Few of the great artists of the time did; it is strange, too, that mention of the 'twenties inevitably brings to mind the Charleston, that "impious thing" so-called by an English clergyman very much of the old school. Yet until the summer of 1925, half-way through the decade, this strange dance was practically unknown in England, and it was regarded in America principally as a production number from an all-negro revue called *Roxie's Wild*. The music was by an outstanding pianist and composer named James P. Johnson, born in New Jersey in 1891, and one of the major influences on a corpulent young negro from a strictly religious New York family, Thomas "Fats" Waller. The show was produced in 1923, but recordings of the original Charleston did not appear in the shops in large numbers until 1925, even in the States. When they did, they were available by all kinds of bands, from Paul Whiteman's, which featured the piano duettists Harry Perrella and Raymond Turner, to smaller groups assembled purely for recording and named for the purpose The Texas Ten, The Six Black Diamonds and The Blues Chasers. The first British recording was by the Savoy Orpheans, and the leader, Debrooy Somers, claimed it was unique in a spoken preface. Its uniqueness lay in the fact that it had such an introduction; soon there were hundreds of other records described as being played in Charleston rhythm, and tunes were soon pouring out of Tin Pan Alley, deliberately constructed to exploit the heavy stomping accents associated with the heel-kicking characteristics of the dance movement. (Danced by experts, and those with a natural flair for modern dancing, the Charleston was as graceful as any other style, as indeed was rock-'n'-roll three decades later but both were so often performed so badly, it is hardly surprising they came in for some scathing and usually ill-informed criticism from professional youth-haters.)

One of the more interesting products of the Charleston as a dance rhythm was a tune called *Jig Walk*, which had a moderate success in 1926. It was composed by a young negro from Washington named Edward Kennedy Ellington, nicknamed "Duke" while at school from his insistence on always looking smart. He had a natural gift for music, and after playing with various small bands in Washington, he joined Wilbur Sweatman's Original Jazz Band in New York in 1920. (He did not record with this unit, however; it made many records from 1917 to 1920, for Columbia, but although described as a jazz band, its music was more that of a ragtime brass band with a strong flavour of the circus ring.) Two years with Sweatman was enough for Duke Ellington; in 1922 he joined Elmer Snowden's Orchestra, and by 1926 he had his own band, which included some of Snowden's men, at the Kentucky Club in New York. There he came to the ever-watchful attention of an astute band manager named Irving Mills, who liked what he heard and saw enough to take over the management of the band, and

at whose suggestion Duke Ellington added brass and reed players to make an organization that could interpret the astonishing scores he prepared for it. Mills booked the band into the Cotton Club in Harlem as from December 4, 1927; it remained there until February, 1931, during which time its repertoire included not only the commercial tunes of the time that were given outstanding performances, but an incredible number of original works from the fertile mind and imagination of the pianist-leader.

Among the best known generally are *Creole Love Call*, the original recording of which featured the plaintive voice of Adelaide Hall, alternating with savage growls that echoed the plunger-muted sounds from the trumpet and trombone soloists; *Black And Tan Fantasy*, an eerie but compellingly fascinating tone-poem depicting a funeral service in the Deep South (it concludes with a few bars from Chopin's famous *Funeral March*); *The Mooche*, another weird melody built on a descending phrase from the three clarinets into a series of muted brass mutterings, accompanied by hollow beating on the temple or Chinese-blocks; *Mood Indigo* (originally entitled more prosaically *Dreamy Blues*), a slow, ethereal number of great melodic simplicity and beauty, to which lyrics have since been added; and Ellington's signature tune, *East St Louis Toodle-Do*, actually referring to a dance but at one time believed to commemorate the terminus of the railroad in East St Louis, where tramps riding the rods at the company's expense would disperse for the next stage of their peripatetic careers. We shall meet Duke Ellington again later in this book, as there can be no doubt that his orchestra, once merely an item in a cabaret show, now in its fifth decade of life as one of the great concert orchestras of the world, produced dance music in the 'twenties, 'thirties and 'forties that for sheer inventiveness, originality, and taste was far ahead of any of its contemporaries.

Although by the beginning of 1926, political affairs seemed to be settling down peaceably (evinced by the signing of the Treaty of Locarno in December, 1925, by representatives of Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany, the withdrawal of large numbers of Britain's army of occupation in Germany, and the entry of the latter into the League of Nations), in May of that year the General Strike in Britain provided ample proof that all was not well domestically by a long way. It was over in nine days, but it ruined business for a visiting American personality, Paul Whiteman himself, and his band that had increased considerably in size since its previous visit exactly three years earlier. Nevertheless, a good proportion of the Whiteman tour took place as planned before the strike began. This included a concert in the Royal Albert Hall on Sunday, April 11, which was recorded by HMV but never issued. It consisted, among other items, of the *Mardi Gras* movement from Ferdie Grofé's *Mississippi Suite*; a concert arrangement of *St Louis Blues* and a *Tiger Rag* that showed the transition from Dixieland



Above: James P. Johnson.

Right: Duke Ellington in 1930.

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to Whiteman-style dance-cum-concert music; various popular tunes of the day that had been recorded by the orchestra during the last few months before visiting England; and George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blues*, with the composer at the piano. (A recording of this, under Whiteman's name but Nat Shilkret's direction, also with Gershwin at the piano, was made in the USA the following year; it replaced the old pre-electric recording of the same work that had been made in June, 1924, following Whiteman's very successful introduction of the work at his famous concert in New York's Aeolian Hall on February 12. Whiteman had tried at this concert to demonstrate the growth and development of what was still indiscriminately called "jazz" by having his trumpet, trombone, clarinet, piano and drums "re-create" an approximation of the Dixieland sound, almost as a scornful joke, but it went down as well as, if not actually better than, anything else on the programme!) Disgusted that a



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or *I Ain't Got Nobody*, or hundreds of other popular tunes, many of them dross that became transmuted into instant gold by the magic of the matchless Massachusetts musician).

The original Savoy Orpheans, first directed by Deboy Somers and then by its violinist-vocalist Cyril Ramon Newton, had undergone little change in the years between 1924 and 1926. Its first-class trumpet-player for most of that time was an American named Vernon Ferry, its trombonist a rumbustious character, also American, named George Chaffin, and many lurid stories are still told by musicians who remember with chuckles the escapades in which Chaffin took part. Ferry returned to America in the summer of 1926, to be succeeded briefly by a compatriot named Charles Rocco, who in turn was replaced, as of January 15, 1927 – the day before the death of Bert Ralton, the first American to lead a “modern” dance band in the Savoy – by the ex-Paul Specht trumpet man, Frank Guarente. By now, the leadership had passed to a quietly spoken, bespectacled American from Boston named Carroll Gibbons, later to become one of the best-known and best-liked dance-music personalities in London. No one who listened to late-night dance music on the radio during the ‘thirties and ‘forties will have forgotten the affably drawling

The Savoy Orpheans (1926).

voice that signed off his show with “Good-night, everybody.”

Although obviously keenly aware of what constituted the best in “hot” dance music from the connoisseurs’ viewpoint, Carroll Gibbons was also well versed in the art of giving the customers what they wanted, and if, as during the ‘thirties it so happened, what they wanted was soothing, romantic music, “Gibby” was ready to give it to them. He used Frank Guarente in short improvised solos on certain records, made for HMV during 1927; after the Orpheans under Carroll Gibbons left the Savoy at the end of that year, they went on a tour of Germany, and disbanded on returning home in the spring of 1928. Carroll Gibbons was then appointed Director of Light Music to HMV. He was just twenty-five years old. He supplied the accompaniments to all the popular artists who came to the studios in Hayes, Middlesex, or to the Small Queen’s Hall in London, ranging from the great American bass Paul Robeson to Anona Winn from Australia, from Gracie Fields to Whispering Jack Smith. He also instituted the New Mayfair Dance Orchestra, which was purely a “house” organization made up of the finest talent drawn from bands playing regularly in hotels and clubs in the West End. It is hardly surprising that British-recorded dance music reached a peak of quality in the late ‘twenties with the formation of this orchestra, whose personnel, though fairly regular, could and did vary

Opposite page: Top: *Fred Elizalde and his Music; they brought “hot” music to the London Savoy Hotel in 1926.*

Left: *Ambrose and his Orchestra at the Mayfair Hotel, London, 1928.*



somewhat from session to session, depending on who was available. Not unnaturally, "Gibby" used his fellow Massachusettsian Sylvester Ahola on trumpet whenever possible.

Early in 1930, Carroll Gibbons returned to America and worked as staff composer to M-G-M films in Hollywood, and also directed some recordings in Victor's New York studios. These were designed for the British market, and were by singers not forming part of the dance-band world at all, so much as that of the musical theatre. In the autumn of 1931, "Gibby" came back to form yet another Savoy Orpheans, to begin with in partnership with his old friend, Howard Jacobs, a fine saxophonist from Dedham, Massachusetts. For the next twenty-three years, there was hardly a time when there was a band playing for dancing in the Savoy Hotel that was not directed by Carroll Gibbons, but in May, 1954, he died suddenly.

Returning to the mid-twenties, and 1925 in particular, it was in the early summer of that year that the famous Kit-Cat Club was opened in London. The first band to play there was an American unit which we have already met: Vincent Lopez and his Hotel Pennsylvania Orchestra. Opposite this band was a specially built small band out of the Jack Hylton office, under the direction of an American clarinet and saxophone player named Al Starita. He was one of three brothers, all musicians of direct Italian birth, but naturalized Americans. The others were Ray and Rudy, the former being a reed player (doubling clarinet and tenor saxophone) and the latter a drummer doubling xylophone, as many percussionists did in those days. All three were on the Hylton payroll, Ray being in charge of the dance music in the Piccadilly Hotel (the band was called the Piccadilly Revels Band), and Rudy was the drummer-xylophonist in the group. In 1929, Hylton put Ray Starita in command of the music in the Ambassador's Club, and Rudy was again the drummer. All three brothers were fine musicians, and by their American expertise, they did a great deal to improve the quality of British dance music and at the same time provided work for British musicians.

They did a good deal of free-lancing on records; indeed, most American visitors sooner or later were used on British recordings, and this tended to improve the quality of these. Sylvester Ahola was in particular demand, and anonymously he contributed some superb music to countless records made in London (or Hayes) between the beginning of 1928 and March, 1930. Then following a complaint from members of the Musicians' Union that maintained that the use of resident American talent was actually harming the livelihood of British musicians, and a representation to the Minister of Labour in Ramsay MacDonald's second Labour government, he and some (but not all) other Americans were prohibited from recording further sides except with the band normally employing

them (in "Hooley's" case, Ambrose). While appreciating the logic of this argument, "Hooley" found his time hanging heavy when he was not on the stand in the May Fair ballroom. His decision to return home was to some extent influenced by the embargo on his participating in recording sessions other than those under Ambrose's direction.

The ban did not apply to any of the Staritas, however, as they had become naturalized Britons, and they continued to direct recording sessions under their own and other names for several more years. The first British band in the Kit-Cat not only included its illustrious American leader, but two musicians whom Jack Hylton had known from the days of the 1921 depression. They were the trumpet player Tom Smith and the trombonist Ted Heath, and both had been members of an ex-Servicemen's band consisting of five brass players who roamed the streets of London's West End playing every kind of popular music from ballads and Neapolitan folk-songs to the latest "hits." Bert Heath, Ted's elder brother, was the trumpet player in the original "Queen's" Dance Orchestra; he introduced Ted to Hylton, who was sufficiently impressed to earmark the young trombonist for future use, and the opportunity came when arrangements were put in motion for the formation of a small unit for the new London night-spot. Ted Heath subsequently joined Ambrose (in 1928), staying with him until the end of 1935, when he worked first with Syd Lipton at the Grosvenor House and subsequently with Gerald. In 1944, he branched out on his own as a leader, becoming extremely popular with youngsters who attended his Sunday concerts at the London Palladium. Highly successful tours of the United States and Europe followed, and Ted Heath continued to direct his band until not long before his death in 1969.

His colleague in the street band and later at the Kit-Cat, however, was never to taste anything like Ted Heath's success. While waiting for a train on Victoria station on the afternoon of June 21, 1931, Tom Smith had a brainstorm, threw himself under an oncoming train, and died of his injuries. At the time of this tragedy, he was a member of the resident dance orchestra that worked for the BBC under the direction of Jack Payne, a pianist and vocalist whose career in professional bandleading began in 1925. He had realized his boyhood ambition to fly when he served with the old Royal Flying Corps during World War I, while still in his teens. (He was born in Leamington, Warwickshire, in 1899.)

He became interested in dance music while still in uniform, organizing various small bands during that time. Possessed of a determined personality, he eventually approached the Hotel Cecil management with the proposal that his band, then a sextet, was just what this establishment needed. He convinced

Left: Carroll Gibbons.

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the authorities and for the next three years supplied interesting dance music that was broadcast regularly from the Hotel Cecil.

Jack Payne's music became popular. He recorded extensively, singing the vocal choruses himself, having handed the work of piano playing and arranging to Bert Read, now with Australian Television in an executive capacity. In February, 1928, Jack Payne was appointed Director of Dance Music to the BBC, a position he held for the next four years. A short while after this appointment, Bert Read left to join Ambrose as pianist and arranger, and was replaced on Jack

Payne's arranging staff by a young man of twenty-one named Ray Noble. The extraordinary genius for knowing exactly how to obtain the best results from any group of musicians for whom he was arranging led Ray Noble to succeed Carroll Gibbons as Musical Director of HMV while Gibbons was in Hollywood; his story belongs more properly to the next chapter, as does Jack Payne's, and there we shall meet them again.

The success of Paul Whiteman's Aeolian Hall concert in New York in 1924 was probably the inspiration for the Queen's Hall concerts in London the following



year by the Savoy bands, referred to earlier in this chapter. Inexplicably, but perhaps due to the constant stream of rudeness from the eminent, but where dance music was concerned, ill-informed "serious" musicians, efforts were constantly being made in popular music circles to effect a marriage between "jazz" (actual or so-called) and concert music. To be loved and accepted by the high and mighty ones of the music world, this was apparently the sole aim of many arrangers, promoters and dance-band musicians. Exactly why this peculiar form of musical snobbery should have existed is obscure, since jazz, which had

Left: Al Starita and the Piccadilly Players (1928).

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Above: Ray Savita and the Ambassadors Club Band (1928).

given birth to modern dance music and was still its greatest influence for the better, was an entirely new concept and had little or nothing in common with the aims and purposes of concert music. Nevertheless, George Gershwin, as we have seen, attempted to bring about this misalliance by means of his *Rhapsody in Blue*, which has become very popular with those who could never come to terms with either out-and-out jazz (or even high quality dance music) or classics



other than the threadbare "pops" in that field. The musicians who disliked jazz and dance music elevated their brows a little further, and the dance-music connoisseurs disowned the *Rhapsody* as containing little to interest their taste, so Gershwin's noble aspirations did not achieve their object; the work was dismissed by several critics as being no more than a pastiche of Liszt, and they preferred Liszt, thank you. Gershwin's other concert works included a *Concerto in F* which Paul Whiteman also played regularly from 1928 onwards; given that *Rhapsody in Blue* was by Gershwin, there is no doubt as to the authorship of the concerto. He also wrote a set of Preludes that occasionally get a hearing; a light-hearted piece called *An American in Paris*, and a Cuban *Overture*. His most interesting major work is the opera *Porgy and Bess*, which was presented in 1935 for what it is: an American opera to be performed by an all-negro cast, with arias and duets based very closely on negro idiomatic usage, but no one at any time, as far as I am aware, has ever suggested it as a "jazz" opera.

In 1928, in Berlin, there was produced something that bore just such a sub-title. This was *Johnny Strikes Up* (or *Johnny spielt auf*) by a composer named Krenek. If anything, the music of its score bore even less relationship to jazz and dance music than did Gershwin's. It never achieved much popularity in England, still less in America. Both countries preferred to dance to music that epitomized the times to sitting in a concert-hall or opera-house listening to something that was neither one thing nor the other. Thus, when a reader of *The Gramophone* wrote about the first Savoy bands' concert in Queen's Hall (on January 3, 1925), he should not have been surprised that an audience that came to see and hear a band to which they had danced on records, or perhaps to broadcasts on 2LO from the Savoy Hotel, was "not a Queen's Hall audience, and preferred the freakish *Eccentric* which followed [an excerpt from Dvořák's *New World Symphony* and a snatch of Wagner]." *Eccentric* had been featured by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band five years or so before the Savoy Orpheans used it; it had been written by the Dixielanders' pianist, J. Russel Robinson, long before he joined them for the London trip, and although the jazz pioneers never recorded it, the Orpheans did, with conspicuous success; their adherents preferred such things as *Horsey! Keep Your Tail Up* and *The Toy Drum Major*, but they evidently felt that anything was preferable to their favourite dance organization, however much augmented – which it was – playing other than dance music.

But the Savoy Orpheans were not the only band in Britain to attempt other than dance music. Jack Hylton, perhaps the most outstanding personality in British dance music during the 'twenties, was giving more and more time to appearing as a show-band leader in theatres, and from the mid-twenties, his band seldom worked engagements in hotels or ballrooms. Instead, it toured the country and, during the

five months between October, 1928 and March, 1929, Jack Hylton and his Orchestra were on the Continent of Europe, playing hugely successful engagements in Germany and France. It was now fourteen strong, and in its ranks were such outstanding musicians as Jack Jackson (trumpet and "hot" vocalist, famed for the last quarter-century as a disc-jockey with a crazy line of patter), Noel "Chappie" d'Amato (alto saxophone and guitar, sometimes vocalist and deputy leader), Billy Tennent (tenor saxophone) and EO Pogson (every conceivable kind of reed instrument, but principally clarinet and alto saxophone).

"Poggy," now retired, is one of those instantly likeable characters, and everything seemed to happen to him. On arrival in the band-coach in Hamburg, "Poggy" stepped out of the door nearest to his seat, straight into a canal, and played the engagement that night in borrowed clothes. "Chappie" d'Amato, now a director of Fulham Football Club, worked with Hylton from 1923 for many years; he took over temporary leadership of the band from February 11, 1927, as Jack Hylton was convalescing from a serious motor smash in which he was severely injured, while he was on his way to Hayes to record a new number, *Shepherd Of The Hills*. He had taken it down from its composer, Horatio Nicholls, who had dictated it over the newly opened transatlantic telephone from New York. (Nicholls had written it on board ship on the way over, having noticed a horse of that name in the sports section of an old newspaper he was reading idly on deck.)

The Hylton band was a superb organization. Rumour had it that Sir Edward Elgar had arranged some dance numbers for it, and its repertoire included Eric Coates' symphonic works *The Selfish Giant* and *The Three Bears*, which although not openly attempting a union between the jazz idiom and the established methods of concert music, were nevertheless condemned by serious critics when records of them were issued, for no better reason than that (a) they were performed by a "jazz" band, and (b) they featured movements for saxophones. (Maurice Ravel's famous *Bolero*, written a year or two later and first performed in 1928, also featured a saxophone and was by the very nature of its rhythmic pattern designed basically for dancing, albeit ballet rather than ballroom dancing, but strangely it escaped censure. Ravel, after all, was rightly regarded as acceptable and respectable, although "modern"; Hylton, who had done the dreadful deed of playing other than dance music, was beyond the pale.)

Nevertheless, the Hylton band was not dependent on the strictures of narrow-minded pedants. Its leader was a showman; after giving up the band soon after the outbreak of World War II, he became an impresario, and remained so until shortly before his

Left: Ted Heath; pioneer British (hot) trombone player and band leader.

[MM]

death in January, 1965. One of his more spectacular productions while in the band business was to hire a 'plane, fill it with the Hylton band, Mr and Mrs Hylton, Horatio Nicholls (the publisher, Lawrence Wright) and his wife, and, on Sunday, September 4, 1927, to fly to Blackpool from Croydon. The huge biplane circled the famous Tower, bringing out crowds of holidaymakers who could distinctly hear the band playing the latest British dance number, *Me And Jane In A Plane*, above the roar of the engines. The 'plane "bombed" the crowd with a small package, which, when opened, was found to contain the band parts of the number. These were rushed to Ray Starita and the Piccadilly Revels Band who were appearing that week at the Palace Theatre, and that evening they played the number in their Sunday evening concert in the Tower. Hylton recorded it, featuring a vocal trio of himself, Jack Jackson and Billy Tennent, and this was recently reissued in a World Record Club LP of Hylton titles. The recording is a triumph of the technician's skill; the tune is original and the lyrics fresh and amusing, even after so long. Irving Berlin secured the American publishing rights, but the States did not seem to want to know; America was still basking in the glory of Col. Lindbergh's solo flight eastwards across the Atlantic, and there were songs aplenty commemorating the event. None of them met with anything like the success, even in America, that the cheerful little song about the couple going on their honeymoon in a two-seater 'plane had in England.

Further European tours included Belgium, Italy, Switzerland and Denmark. Jack Hylton tried several times to get engagements for his band to play in Soviet Russia and the USA but without success. He was the first British bandleader to direct a broadcast to the latter, and made several journeys there; at the end of 1935, he took his vocalist, Pat O'Malley, to the States and even recorded some sides in Chicago. O'Malley, whose latest in a long line of claims to fame was as the voice of "Colonel Hathi" in the Walt Disney full-length cartoon *The Jungle Book*, was accompanied by an American band organized for the purpose. Pat O'Malley remained there; Hylton returned and resumed his bandleading for a further four years. He and his band appeared on stage at the London Palladium in *Life Begins At Oxford Circus* and in a film called *She Shall Have Music*.

Most Jack Hylton records were made for the Gramophone Company, and were issued on HMV or the less expensive Zonophone label, as we have seen; but when the contract expired in October, 1931, Hylton signed with the up-and-coming Decca label, remaining with that company for three years. During that time, public taste was veering away from the "hotter" type of dance music and was demanding more sentimental material, so Hylton of course supplied it. (He had a great interest in the work of the advanced American "hot jazz" players, and experimented with the style at the end of 1927 by having a

small band, drawn from the full orchestra, record a number called *Grieving For You* that compared very favourably with the American model. Messrs. Jackson, Pogson, and d'Amato were concerned with it, and the "hot" violin passage was played by one of the regular Hylton violinists, who later became conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra: Hugo Rignold.) In 1933, however, after Duke Ellington had visited England for the first time and demonstrated the only true way of effecting any sort of union between jazz, dance and concert music, Jack Hylton had his orchestra record something called *Ellingtonia*, which consisted of a chorus from some of the Duke's best-known work, played in such an Ellingtonian manner that when the members of the Ellington band heard it, they are said to have recognized each other's playing - but not their own!

Jack Hylton imported several first-class European musicians at various times and gave them positions in his main organization. Philippe Brun, the greatest "hot" trumpet player France ever produced, was a Hylton man during the years between 1929 and 1931; Leo Vauchant, a French trombonist, was in the band during 1928, and in the mid-thirties, a Belgian saxophonist named André Ekyan graced the reed section. When the second world war came, Hylton decided that rather than continue the band under his name, but using such musicians as had been unaffected by the call-up, he would disband entirely and concentrate on producing musicals.

The "hot" style of playing was distinguishable from "straight" dance music in that the arranger, who did not necessarily always prepare a score, allowed solo or ensemble passages where the musicians to whom they were allotted could improvise, paraphrasing the original melody as written. Usually this gave added zest to the performers, which they communicated to their audiences, and "hot" solos or section work usually came at the end of the number, providing an interesting, even a thrilling climax to the music. In the spring of 1927, the first records reached Britain from America which were played "hot" from start to finish, and which were recognized as something different. There had been dance records with extemporized solos issued in England for years before this; some of Fletcher Henderson's records, under his own name and under various all-embracing pseudonyms, for example, had been showcases for the superbly rhythmic and exciting cornet work of young Louis Armstrong, and when a band of American colleagues, known as the Carolina Club Orchestra, under the direction of Hal Kemp, visited London in the summer of 1924, they recorded several titles for Columbia that also came within the definition of "hot" music.

These, though, were all promoted along with "straight" dance music, ie that which does not deviate so much as a quaver from what is written in the score. To those trained in the strict European tradition that



Red Nichols and his Five Pennies.

what the composer wrote, and how he wrote it, was all-important, such freedom seemed like anarchy indeed; but there is no doubt that a subtly-phrased *ad lib* chorus or half-chorus solo, accompanied only by the rhythm section, or with sustained harmony from the saxophones or muted brass, could and did add to the enjoyment of the number, both for the players and their listeners, and as one writer put it, it could awaken the latent terpsichorean urge. (The anti-jazz brigade increased the frenzy of their condemnatory vilifications, one of them announcing he found it comparable to having teeth drawn without gas in the middle of a particularly bad bilious attack. There was certainly something very bilious indeed about such comments, but perhaps the very pinnacle of hatred was reached by the late Ernest Newman, who likened Duke Ellington to "a Harlem Dionysus, drunk on shoddy bathtub liquor.") An illustration of how a first-class soloist using his imagination to recast a pretty trivial melody line and so make something interesting out of nothing occurs in Fletcher Henderson's record of *I Miss My Swiss* (*My Swiss Miss Misses Me*), which was issued in America under the name of the Southern Serenaders, and in England on Regal as by the Corona Dance Orchestra (this was the usual name given by Regal to its dance records, regardless of who played on them). After playing the jingly little tune twice (with a vocal chorus in between) and the verse once, the brass and saxophone section stop playing, all except Louis Armstrong, who improvises a beauti-

ful half chorus on cornet, accompanied only by the rhythm section, prominent in which can be heard the drummer, firmly accenting the off-beats on a cymbal which he mutes after each stroke to give a clearer presentation of the exciting rhythmic effect. Yet this splendid device passed unnoticed among the public on both sides of the Atlantic, who bought the record in their thousands, for it was a very successful novelty of the autumn season of 1925. (Paul Whiteman also recorded it "straight" throughout; he featured a yodelling chorus which made a more instant public appeal. Ted Lewis recorded it without a vocal at all, and comparatively little attempt at playing the brand of near-Dixieland that characterized, and made more interesting, many of his other records.)

Then came the first records of "hot" music designed for those who found "straight" dance music rather tedious. Prominent among the spearhead of the new movement were the records of Red Nichols and his Five Pennies, on Brunswick. Ernest Loring Nichols was born in Ogden, Utah, in 1905, and graduated from Culver Military Academy in 1920. He was like so many young lads of his generation, anxious to play jazz, and using his sound musical training as a military-band cornetist, he proceeded to further his education by playing in dozens of bands until, on reaching New York in 1923, he was ready for the big-time.

He played in dozens more bands during the next four years, such as those led by Johnny Johnson, Sam Lanin, George Olsen, Ed Kirkeby (Nichols was one of the California Ramblers for a while), Paul Whiteman and Don Voorhees. His playing was delicate but usually interesting; he had superb technical command of his instrument and a feeling for beautiful *shapes* of melody lines, and could liven up the dulllest routine performance by just a few bars solo. His closest associate in those years was the trombonist Milfred "Miff" Mole, whose ability on his instrument matched Nichols' own, and together they made dozens of records designed to attract musicians anxious to improve their own technique, the growing legion of "hot music" connoisseurs (principally college students, on both sides of the Atlantic) and the dance crowd alike. The announcement of the first Five Pennies records brought a flood of similar recordings by much the same musicians under other names from other companies; they were known as Miff Mole's Molars on OKeh (Parlophone in England), the Charleston Chasers (Columbia), the Red Heads (Pathé) and Red and Miff's Stompers (Victor - HMV - and Edison). The clarinet and alto saxophone player was Jimmy

Dorsey as a rule, and like Red Nichols himself later on, he became the leader of an internationally famous dance band. (See Chapter 5.)

Red Nichols was not only featured with straight and "hot" dance bands of hotel and ballroom fame, however. One of the groups that occasionally employed him was directed by Harry Reser, who had replaced Paul Whiteman's regular banjoist, Mike Pingitore, for the first trip the band made to London in the spring of 1923. Reser was a brilliant technician on his instrument, and he also played guitar and alto saxophone. It is as a banjoist he is best remembered, though, and during the last half of the 'twenties, he and his own band almost lived in the recording studios, turning out records for all the companies who had studios in New York. Such names as the Clicquot Club Eskimos, the Six Jumping Jacks, the Blue Kittens, the Bostonians, the Jazz Pilots and the Seven Wild Men are only a few used to disguise the direction of Harry Reser, and the personnel varied but little. Older readers may recall having possessed some

Below: *Harry Reser (centre) and his Syncopators (1928).*

Right: *Red Nichols in the 30s.*

[EMI





records by one or other of these strangely-named bands; at other times, the recording would take place under the nominal leadership of one of the members of the band, and thus we can find sides labelled Earl Oliver's Jazz Babies (after the trumpet player who was no relation to the negro "King" Oliver), or Jimmy Johnston's Rebels (Johnston played bass saxophone in the band, which usually had no other bass), or, very soberly, Bill Wriges and his Orchestra (Wriges was the pianist and often the arranger). Then there were sides by Tom Stacks and his Minute Men, Stacks being the drummer and mostly the vocalist. His exultant voice can be heard on literally dozens, perhaps hundreds of sides, and it seems to typify the glorious optimism of the times. The general sound of the band, dominated by Reser's banjo and Johnston's rather stertorous bass saxophone, is pure bucolic "corn," but even "corn" can have its standards of excellence, and for sheer drive and exuberance, "beat" and attack, these bands (or rather, this band!) of Harry Reser's is hard to beat indeed. Oliver's trumpet was easily recognizable for its strange rasping tone, which he probably imagined was "hot"; his replacement was Tommy Gott, another ex-Whiteman musician, a very loud, rather brash player, but much "hotter" in the musical sense; and when neither were able to be present, there was Red Nichols, who outshone both with his perfectly phrased, beautifully constructed, well-moulded solos that were always in impeccable taste.

The American organization that most successfully absorbed the "hot" style without sacrificing any of its well-deserved popularity as a "straight" orchestra, however, was led by a French-born, Russian-educated pianist named Jean Goldkette. He headed a business operating from headquarters in Detroit, and his principal band between 1924 and 1927 reached a peak of perfection that many authorities, and the writer also, consider has never been surpassed. Goldkette himself was not a dance-band musician so much as a concert artist, but he was sufficiently sensitive to the needs of his audience and appreciative of great artistry within the idiom to know which musicians would produce the most suitable effect. Hence, he engaged such outstanding men as the greatest dance-band violinist of all time, Joe Venuti; the Dorsey Brothers, Tommy on trumpet and trombone, Jimmy on reeds; drummer Chauncey Morehouse (late of Paul Specht's orchestra); trombonist Bill Rank, whose splendid playing brought him recognition among the fans in England long before Jack Teagarden was heard of, and who at this writing is playing better than ever, without doubt the greatest living exponent of his particular style of trombone-playing; and Bix Beiderbecke on cornet and Frankie Trumbauer on G-melody saxophone. To provide the kind of arrangements that would give each of these giants a chance to offer his best individually and collectively, Jean Goldkette hired a young arranger from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, named

Bill Challis. For sheer taste, brilliance and imagination, Challis was in a class by himself, and today his scores sound infinitely less dated than do those of any of his contemporaries.

Alas, the greatest band of them all existed for a short time only. In its finest form, it lasted for just a year, from September, 1926 to September, 1927. The Jean Goldkette Orchestra played the Roseland Ballroom in New York, went on a tour of New England during the summer, returning to the Roseland for a short time at the end. It was an expensive band, of course; and Goldkette, who was not only a sensitive musician but also a commonsense business man - a rare combination indeed! - reluctantly disbanded when the Roseland season was over. Thereafter, records bearing his name were mostly made in Kansas City where he had a band that featured Haggy Carmichael as vocalist, pianist and sometimes cornet soloist, or in Chicago, with a band that included trombonist Walter "Pee Wee" Hunt (famous in the late 'forties for his deliberately dated version of *Twelfth Street Rag*). Goldkette also managed a negro band that for richness and fine rhythmic attack has seldom been equalled. The nominal leader was William McKinney, and the band was known as McKinney's Cotton Pickers, but the arranger and actual leader was a Virginian saxophonist late of the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra, named Don Redman. (The great musicians who played in the Cotton Pickers' ranks include various other ex-Henderson men, as well as "Fats" Waller on piano.) Jean Goldkette also had another band under the direction and arrangement of violinist Victor Young, famed as the composer of *Sweet Sue - Just You, I Don't Stand A Ghost Of A Chance With You*, and *Around The World*, out of many other successes. Eventually, in the early 'thirties, he gave up the band business to work as a manager, making occasional appearances in person as a concert pianist. In 1959, one of the first stereo long-playing records of dance music (as distinct from "pops") to be issued in England was of Jean Goldkette's Orchestra. Using the original scores, and some of his original musicians (drummer Morehouse among them), Goldkette directed a very interesting session for the RCA Camden label, to attract old-timers who remembered the great band he had in the 'twenties. Jean Goldkette died in 1962.

Victor Young had graduated to Goldkette by way of two other outstanding bands of the mid-twenties. In 1925 he was a member of the orchestra providing the dance music in the famous Edgewater Beach Hotel, in Chicago. This was under the joint direction of pianist Ted Fiorito and Dan Russo, another violinist. It was known as the Oriole Orchestra, and was unusual in that it featured "hot" solos - admittedly of no great length - by Frank Papale on piano-accompaniment. Its banjoist and vocalist was Nick Lucas, still very active in entertainment in California, although past seventy years of age; Ted Fiorito him-



Joan Goldkette and his Orchestra (1928).

[Rex Harris

self died, aged 70, in July, 1971. He was not only a more than adequate pianist and bandleader, but an exceptionally successful composer of pleasing dance tunes. The titles of some of these will surely be remembered by most readers: *Charley, My Boy; Meadow Lark; King For A Day; Laugh, Clown, Laugh; No, No, Nora*; and as far back as 1919, when he was on the payroll of Harry Yerkes, he wrote a "novelty" Dixieland number called *Barking Dog*. By the end of 1926, Victor Young was playing at the Southmoor Hotel, Chicago, in the band known as Ben Pollack and his Californians. Their trombonist and sometimes arranger was the late Glenn Miller, who persuaded his leader to engage two violinists so that the band would sound more like that of Roger Wolfe Kahn, then at the height of his popularity in New York. (Young Kahn was an indifferent saxophonist, but keenly appreciative of the best dance music, and as his father was Otto Kahn, chairman of the board of the Metropolitan Opera and a millionaire, money was no object in forming a first-class band. Among the principal members of this unit were Miff Mole on trombone

and Joe Venuti on violin; it was a good band, but its records are relatively rarely of interest to the connoisseur as the stars in its ranks get only infrequent chances to shine.)

I am indebted to Russ Connor, author of *BG On The Record* (published by Arlington House, New York) for the detail about how Victor Young became a member of Ben Pollack's band. The "BG" in the title of the book is Benny Goodman, later to become the "King of Swing," but at that time a boy of seventeen playing his first important job. Ben Pollack was a fine drummer and (something of a vocalist whose gimmick was to end each number with the words, "May it please you - Ben Pollack"). He had worked with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, an out-and-out jazz unit that had set a new high standard in "hot" dance music in Chicago in the earlier 'twenties. Pollack had played on the West Coast with his own band in the Venice Ballroom in Los Angeles before securing the Chicago position, hence the name of his band.



Having received his training in a first-class small "hot" band of pioneers in the art of solo improvising, Ben Pollack saw to it that his own band could boast similar soloists. Hence he engaged Benny Goodman, the man who in later years did perhaps more than any other single musician to bring about a complete *entente* between dance music and the established classics by playing the clarinet solo part in the Mozart Clarinet Quintet, with the Budapest String Quartet, the Mozart Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, and by appearing as soloist with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under the late Sir John Barbiroli. Nor was his excursion into the concert field confined to Mozart and Bach and the long-established composers; he took part also in a performance of Bela Bartók's *Contrasts for Violin, Clarinet and Piano*, with Joseph Szigeti (with whom he had commissioned the work) playing the violin part, and the composer himself at the piano. The braying of the self-opinionated asses who condemned jazz and dance music out of hand as being the ugly jungle noises of musical illiterates was thus most effectively silenced. It should be remembered in this connection that Benny Goodman cherished a life-long admiration for the Original Dixieland clarinetist Larry Shields, whose flowing, graceful lines of musical thought influenced young Goodman early in his long career, and on which he built his own way of expressing his music.

The days of Benny Goodman's musical double life, though, are ahead of our story. He worked with Ben Pollack for nearly three years, half of that time in New York, first at the rather obscure Little Club, and from the autumn of 1928 to the late summer of 1929 in the Park Central Hotel. His brother Harry was the bass player, and by now, Glenn Miller had opted out to devote more time to arranging (though he still played dates for Sam Lanin and Red Nichols), leaving the trombone chair vacant. It was quickly filled by a young Texan with a splendidly florid style, a feeling for blues playing, and an engagingly lazy way of singing. Jack Teagarden, born in Vernon, Texas, in 1905, came near to being a vocal rival to Bing Crosby, with whom he made a film (*The Birth Of The Blues*). By this time, 1941, Jack Teagarden had a band of his own; he had served five years with Ben Pollack and five with Paul Whiteman, and had had two years as a leader in his own right. He broke up his big band in November, 1946, formed a new small band with Louis Armstrong, and toured the States and the world with this. Various replacements were made, including that of Armstrong himself, before the All-Stars as they were known, played in London in October, 1957; they also played in Bangkok before the King of Siam,



Jack Teagarden.

[Breno of Hollywood

and seemed to be set for a long period of success when Teagarden had a heart attack which proved fatal in his hotel room in New Orleans in January, 1964.

Benny Goodman, happily, is still very much with us; he can claim to be the only American to take a band to Moscow and play there. (The man in charge at the time, Premier Nikita Khrushchev, did not like what he heard.) His first leader, Ben Pollack, committed suicide in June, 1971; he appeared as himself in the films *The Glenn Miller Story* and *The Benny Goodman Story*, although neither of the title-roles were played by the musicians themselves. Although it was stated earlier that Benny Goodman played with Ben Pollack's Californians from 1926 to 1929, there was a brief period early in 1928 when Goodman was a member of the new band recruited by Isham Jones (see also Chapter 1). Jones had been a prominent member of the Chicago bandleaders' coterie since immediate post-war days, and had written many very popular songs, such as *Swingin' Down The Lane*, *Spain*, *Shanghai Lullaby*, *It Had To Be You* and *I'll See You In My Dreams*. Jones himself was a tenor saxophonist, and he devised a novel orchestral tone-colour by the use of one trumpet and two trombones, reversing the usual ratio, and scoring the reed passages to include the oboe behind his own contributions. He also liberated the tuba, or bass horn, from the constricting two-in-a-bar playing by marking the bass part to be played *legato*. He brought his band to London in the

Opposite page: Top: *The Oriole Terrace Orchestra with Ted Fiorito in the mid-20s.*

Centre: *Roger Wolfe Kahn and his Orchestra, late 20s.*

Bottom: *Ben Pollack and his Park Central Orchestra (1928).*

autumn of 1925, following Vincent Lopez and Ted Lewis in the Kit-Cat Club. Roy Bargy, its pianist at that time, recalls with great pleasure the royal treatment accorded to him and his colleagues by British musicians and ordinary listeners alike. He was amazed that his own piano solos should be so well known in England.

After Benny Goodman returned to Ben Pollack, he was engaged to take part as a member of the small groups accompanying popular singers of the day, such as Johnny Marvin, Lee Morse, Ruth Etting and Annette Hanshaw. Such recording units were organized by the Artists and Repertoire manager on the staff of each company; as we have seen in Chapter 1, Ben Selvin occupied this position for Columbia Records, and he employed Benny Goodman in a freelance capacity on many of his records, along with such notable musicians as the Dorsey Brothers, Joe Venuti and Adrian Rollini. The director of the house-band in the Victor studios was Nathaniel Shilkret, who was a musician of such broad taste and ability that he could arrange and direct symphonic works and dance music with equanimity. (He was "Nathaniel Shilkret" when conducting the full-sized Victor Symphony Orchestra, and "Nat Shilkret" when directing the resident dance-band. This also sometimes included the ubiquitous Jimmy Dorsey.) Brunswick had Carl Fenton, whose real name was Gus Haenschen, and

OKeh a veteran from Sousa's Band in the 'nineties, Justin Ring. Selvin and Shilkret produced the most interesting arrangements, frequently allowing opportunities for their star instrumentalists to improvise briefly on the subject-matter of the melody.

So the parade of the bands went on. Radio and records brought their work within reach of countless millions throughout the world, and the leaders began to become as famous and worshipped as the stars of the (still-silent) screen. They groomed themselves as personalities; there was Ben Bernie, a violinist of moderate ability but a sparkling front-man for his orchestra that provided dance music for the guests and residents of the Hotel Roosevelt in New York. His radio programme, late at night, ended with the "ol' maestro" wishing everyone "Au revoir, pleasant dreams," in a mincing tone that somehow seemed to attract his audience and endear him to them, then the assurance that "Ben Bernie and all the lads" would be back at the same time, same station, next week. As befitted a sophisticated hotel, there were not many "hot" performances in the Bernie repertoire (although one of the other Bens, Pollack, of the Park Central made room for good solo work in almost everything he offered that was not a waltz); but Bernie had for most of the period covered by this chapter a tenor saxophonist who had begun his professional career with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings

Benny Goodman (1936)



Nat Shilkret.

[RCA Victor Records]



Victor Division
RCA Victor Company, Inc.

Camden, N. J. U.S.A.



RECORDING ARTIST





Gus Arnheim and his Orchestra as seen as they appear in the film "The Street Girl" (1929).

in Chicago: Jack Pettis. His work as a soloist was restricted as a rule to about eight bars a number, but he gets a large slice of the limelight in a record of a little-known song with the incredible title *When Polly Walks Through The Hollyhocks*. A superb brass team that makes the most of the verse that was written for it, Pettis's rich tenor saxophone and a brass bass player with a wicked sense of humour – he plays the coda entirely solo – all contribute to making this Brunswick record a real collector's piece. Ben Bernie was born Benjamin Woodruff Ancel in Bayonne, New Jersey, in 1894, and in his forty-nine years of life he rose from humble beginnings to stardom, not only as a bandleader, but as composer of several songs, the most popular being one that from its appearance in 1925 was an immediate and abiding success, especially with jazz musicians who love to explore and re-explore its possibilities for improvisation: *Sweet Georgia Brown*. The Ben Bernie Orchestra made films (*Shoot The Works*, re-titled *Thank Your Stars* for British audiences, and *Stolen Harmony*, in the mid-thirties) and in 1929, it appeared in London at the Kit-Cat Club, the Mecca of all visiting American bands, and at the Palladium. The *Melody Maker* critic remarked that the band was at that time playing "hotter" than previously, and complimented the "clown" drummer, Dillon Ober, who, as many drummers of those days were, was also an excellent xylophonist. (Arthur Layfield and Herb Quigley, both members of the Benson organization in Chicago during the 'twenties, were in this category, and both of these superb-musicians appeared on Jack Hylton's only American recording date; Hylton's own drummer at one time, Harry Robbins, perhaps better known as a xylophonist, and the Americans who settled in England, Teddy Brown and Rudy Starita, had few equals in both spheres.)

Having remarked on the qualities and shortcomings of the Ben Bernie Orchestra (it lacked refinement, complained the critic, but went on blushing to say that "against this, however, it must be admitted that it has plenty of – to use a vulgar word, for which I ask your forgiveness – guts, rhythmically"), the *Melody Maker* on the same page referred to the imminent appearance in London, at the Savoy Hotel, no less, of Gus Arnheim's Cocoanut Grove Orchestra from Los Angeles.

The leader was a Chicago-born pianist who had written a number of successful dance tunes (*Apple Sauce, I Cried For You* and *Mandalay* are among them), and after a period of three or four years with the band led by Abe Lyman in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, Gus Arnheim formed his own band there. Its policy was the sweeter type of orchestral flavour rather than the hot – molasses rather than chutney, as it were – but some of its records offer something a little more advanced, in particular *Loveable And Sweet*, a number written by the concert pianist Oscar Levant for the early talkie *Street Girl*. Gus Arnheim's orchestra took part in this film, which was showing in London at the New Gallery Cinema coincidentally with Arnheim's appearance with his band. The latter made little impression on critic and public alike; it was recognized for what it was, "a thoroughly musical proposition," said the *Melody Maker* critic, "up-to-date, interprets in the American style and has rhythm (but) there is an undercurrent of restraint about it. It is caused, one gets the impression, by a striving after an often pedantic refinement. . . . All the well known and now rather hackneyed rhythms, effects, phrases, etc. . . . are served-up with the prettiness of a Sunday School class reciting its well-learned catechism . . . one longs . . . for a little of that spontaneous abandonment which . . . gives spice and life to dance music and the dancing it is played to inspire."

Arnheim and his orchestra came and went; the



Left: *Abe Lyman and his Californians* (1929).

Right: *Ted Wears and his Orchestra* (1928).

Below: *Johnny Hamp and his Kentucky Serranaders* (1925).

Bottom: *Fred Rich and his Hotel Astor Orchestra* (1928). (EMI)





following year he engaged as vocalist a young man of Italian extraction named Russ Columbo, who for a short time gave Bing Crosby serious competition in the popularity polls for male singers. (Columbo died after a friend shot him accidentally while demonstrating an old gun.) After Russ Columbo went to New York as a solo artist, Arnheim secured the services of Paul Whiteman's Rhythm Boys, Bing Crosby included, and proceeded to strike it rich when Bing (and a few hundred others the world over) made a new Arnheim composition into a smash hit. This was *Sweet And Lovely*, which might serve as a description of Arnheim's music. Bing Crosby stayed with the band for about eight months, then followed Russ Columbo to New York; Gus Arnheim continued with his vocal trio, still known as the Rhythm Boys despite the major personnel change, and in the mid-thirties his pianist (he had long since given up directing from the keyboard himself) was a young man with advanced ideas, named Stanley Kenton. By the time young Stan Kenton was able to put his musical concepts into practice with his own band, the days of dance music as understood within the terms of reference of this book were virtually over, and by the middle 'fifties, when Kenton brought what was in effect a brassy concert band to London, Arnheim was dead.

So also was his own late leader, Abe Lyman. He too was a Chicagoan, a drummer who was much more of an extrovert showman than Arnheim. Their careers ran in double-harness for quite a while, and they are credited jointly with the composition of the numbers mentioned in connection with Gus Arnheim above. After they went their separate ways when Arnheim formed his own band, their careers ran parallel: both made films - one of Lyman's was called *Hold Everything* - and both visited London in 1929, appearing at the Kit-Cat and the Palladium. Lyman preceded Arnheim by eight months; he arrived in February that year and stayed until early in June. Unlike

Arnheim, Lyman and his men made a vivid impression on London's night-life; the Kit-Cat did record business, principally due to the leader's showmanship. Much of this consisted of juggling with his drumsticks. "His sticks are up in the air most of the time," said the *Melody Maker*, "but it must be admitted that nine times out of ten they fall on the cymbal at the right moment for a crash. . . . Perhaps it is the fortune of fate rather than the predetermination of this juggler with the hickory." With that pompous declaration, Lyman was brushed aside, though his presentation was given a full page (with photograph) of comment, which included such remarks as "the orchestrations . . . were not what one has a right to expect from American top-liners. They showed no plot worth investigation, and no effects that were new or even up-to-date. . . . Jack Hylton, for instance, could play Lyman under the table without troubling to raise an eyebrow."

Much of the Lyman repertoire was of the bucolic kind of humour that the connoisseurs of the best in dance music had hoped had gone out with the "novelty" bands of immediate post-war years. The trombonist, Orlando Martin, known as "Slim," for example, used an unusual kind of mute to produce a curious gabbling effect, when he was not indulging in broad swipes and smears that exploited to the full the sliding characteristics of his instrument, or 'in hoarse, horse-like whinnying and chuckling. As a display of these talents, the old *Twelfth Street Rag* was pressed into service, and as an encore, the band would play a number credited to Abe Lyman himself called *Wearly Weasel*. It was a case of a tiger in a weasel's skin, for the affinity between this number and Nick LaRocca's *Tiger Rag* was extremely close, animal roars and all. Despite this, the Lyman band when required could play some very pleasant music, though the press comment quoted above is fair, and to his credit, Lyman admitted as much before leaving Eng-

land: Jack Hylton, and not only Jack Hylton, in England in the late 'twenties, were not inferior to the best in America.

The best in America seemed to be disregarded by those who elected to invite bands to London. Thus, when Johnny Hamp's Kentucky Serenaders appeared there – at the Kit-Cat, inevitably – in September, 1930, a year all but two weeks after Gus Arnheim and a few months after Ted Lewis's return visit with Jimmy Dorsey in the band, they were received coolly by musicians, dance-band followers and the lay public alike. The *Melody Maker's* roving critic lambasted Hamp mercilessly; "the style switched abruptly from inaudible 'whispering' to noisy 'Dixieland,'" he complained. Every other number featured an almost inaudible muted trumpet chorus, the two violins played with no subtlety, and the drummer seemed to have difficulty holding the tempo. "They have come here mainly on the pretext made on their behalf that they can do something which our musicians can't, and they hopelessly fail to justify it," went on the critic. "No attempt was made to amuse . . . no personality . . . no animation."

Nor did the appearance, in January, 1928, in London of Fred Rich and his Orchestra from the Hotel Astor, New York, bring forth any acclaim from the same paper's correspondent. "Why is it," he asked rather peevishly, "that Fred Rich and his Hotel Astor Orchestra, without any attempt at a stage setting . . . can hold a packed house at the Holborn Empire and rouse it, at times, to considerable enthusiasm? Is it because it renders its numbers in particularly brilliant style, or because it gives an act which is entirely new to our Variety programmes? . . . My personal opinion . . . is that neither of these suggestions provides the explanation: it must be, then, that the 'success' is due to the fact that the turn is American. I honestly believe that British artists are just as capable of giving the same kind of turn if only they would assume the complacent and confident stage presence of their overseas cousins. I do not decry the act, of course; it is a most intriguing show . . . but . . . Showmanship supersedes musical technique, and except for the trombonist . . . one can single out no one instrumentalist for particular praise. The saxophone section is frankly bad . . . the first trumpeter, who is said to be a 'star' man, was absent from the combination owing to a motoring accident. (His place was taken on a recording session in London by the Fred Rich-band for Columbia by Sylvester Ahola. – BR.) It is on the dancing abilities of the members of the band that the act mostly depends for its success, and particularly on the style of the drummer (Ray Bauduc, later with Bob Crosby's band, and famous for his spectacular part in the duet with the bass player, Bob Haggart, of *Big Noise From Winnetka*. – BR.) . . . My considered opinion of the act is that it will continue to go big with certain classes of audiences, but that it will 'flop' with others. . . ."

In view of this, it would have been much more suitable to have invited an American band of the calibre of Ted Weems', for example. Records by both Weems' and Hamp's bands had been appearing regularly on HMV for some years, and from their evidence it is obvious that Ted Weems offered a much more musically satisfying proposition, and as a dance stimulus his band provided music that was second to none. An ex-Paul Specht trombonist from the early post-war days, Ted Weems and his brother Art, who played trumpet, formed a college band that had its first professional engagement of importance in the Trianon Ballroom in Newark, New Jersey. His was a happy band, and sounded it; its members stayed together for years with relatively few changes, offering a neat mixture of music that was sweet without being saccharine and "hot" without being unacceptable to those who liked to hear the tune. The band had a tower of strength in Country Washburn, its Texas-born brass bass player, who with his leader dreamed up a novelty number that combined the flavour of a negro revivalist meeting with hillbilly homespun humour. It was called *Oh! Mo'neh!* (meaning *Oh, Mourner*, but it was generally accepted, in England at least, as being addressed to a girl named Mona). For years, Ted Weems gave most of the vocal work to his tenor saxophonist, Parker Gibbs, but from 1937 until he disbanded the orchestra during the war, his featured singer was a young Italian-American with a lazy, engaging style, named Perry Como. Ted Weems died in 1958.

Another "happy-family" band that could have "gone over" with the British dancing crowd was Coon-Sanders' Original Nighthawks Orchestra, from Chicago. We met them briefly in Chapter 1, as they began their co-operative career in 1919, but it was not until 1924 and the beginning of a regular, and long, series of late-night broadcasts that gave them their name that they became nationally (and via their records, internationally) known. Like Ted Weems's orchestra, the Coon-Sanders personnel changed but little over the years, and like Ted Weems, the band policy was to offer a good balance of musical entertainment that would appeal to all tastes. When the offer came to make late-night broadcasts from the Hotel Sherman in Chicago, one of the leaders commented, "Who's going to hear us except a few nighthawks?" So the name was adopted; in fact, their popularity was such that many Americans who could pick up the station WGN stayed up late to hear the stimulating music the Nighthawks provided. Their records were many, and a considerable number consisted of original tunes composed by pianist Joe Sanders ("the old left-hander," as he was affectionately known; he had been a keen baseball player also). No more delightful recording was ever made of the forward-looking strictly-instrumental number, *Deep Henderson*, than the Nighthawks', despite its also having been made by bands of the eminence of King Oliver's and, in

London in the 'thirties, Ambrose's. This was not a Sanders original, however; but other well-known instrumentals of the mid-late 'twenties such as *High Fever* and *Brainstorm* came from his fertile imagination. In case it should be thought that Joe Sanders was obsessed with diseases when composing, it should be remembered that he also composed the melody to a charming set of lyrics by Gus Kahn, making the waltz ballad *Beloved* which enjoyed great popularity both sides of the Atlantic in 1928. The Nighthawks did not record this, however; that was left to Ted Weems . . . and a great many other bands of the time.

Joe Sanders and his drummer-partner Carlton Coon shared the vocal work. Jointly and severally they contributed singing choruses to those numbers that needed them, providing a touch of light comedy here and there without going to the exaggerated extremes of other leaders. In the early spring of 1932, the band came to New York for an engagement at the New Yorker Hotel. Carlton Coon developed a septic tooth, and on May 5, after returning to Chicago, he died of blood poisoning following an operation. Joe Sanders held the band together for a while when it returned to Chicago, but it was not the same. "Coony" had gone, and with him, it seemed, the conditions that had made the Coon-Sanders Orchestra a success in the 'twenties. Joe Sanders eventually retired, and died in Kansas City thirty-three years almost to the day after his partner.

Because the band was known as Coon-Sanders Orchestra, it was assumed by several English writers who should have checked their facts that this was a negro band. Its vigorous, rich sound and buoyant rhythm gave a good deal of support to this belief. Joe Sanders was not the only composer in the team; Carlton Coon, in 1926, worked out a piece of nonsense called *Hi-Diddle-Dee-Dee*, based of course on the old nursery rhyme. Again, the band did not record it, although in England it was issued as a backing to the aforementioned *Deep Henderson* by the Nighthawks, but played by George Olsen and his Music, and it sold tens of thousands of copies.

There was a good deal of knockabout humour, even low comedy, in the Olsen presentation. Like Waring's Pennsylvanians, the Olsen band specialized in this to some extent; the novelty number *Horses*, which it recorded in 1926, was ideal for the band, and no doubt it helped to increase enormously the already considerable prestige of the unit. The first George Olsen band was a brassless group in which Olsen played drums; it was formed in New Orleans, according to some the birthplace of all that is best in jazz, in 1914 when the leader was twenty-one. He made his first records ten years later, and for the next ten years he rode the crest of popularity in America. He never came to England, however; his band was a good quality, fairly conventional unit featuring vocals by members of the various sections, little in the way of "hot" solos but much to appeal to those who wanted it straight and able to be taken without any mental effort. When George Olsen married the Broadway singing star Ethel Shutta, her voice was to be heard on several of the records. In the late 'thirties, Olsen retired a wealthy man, and opened a roadhouse which

Below: Coon-Sanders' original Nighthawks Orchestra (1926).

Bottom: George Olsen (centre) and his music.



he ran as he had his band for many years, successfully. He died on March 18, 1971, his 78th birthday.

There were other transatlantic musicians who visited England during the latter 'twenties, though. Some of them remained a considerable period of time. One of these was Jay Whidden, who was a violinist with a case of wanderlust. Born in Livingstone, Montana, in the 'eighties, he was a cowboy at ten, a budding violinist at fifteen in Spokane, Washington, and claimed to have founded one of the first "jazz" bands in 1908. He toured the States and Canada before coming to London in 1913 for six months in a revue. After the first world war, he returned to London and formed his first British band. This was for the old Metropole Hotel; later Whidden moved to the Carlton, and recorded a large number of sides for Columbia, Imperial, the little Woolworth's Victory records, and appropriately enough, Metropole. He employed some of the finest musicians in London, all of them English, so there was no case of an American grabbing all the best jobs and so preventing native British musicians from taking them. Jay Whidden was also the vocalist with his band; for some time at the turn of the 'twenties and 'thirties, his pianist and principal arranger was George Scott-Wood, a young man with a great interest in and ability for jazz, "hot" dance music and light classics alike. After Jay Whidden returned finally to America, where he led the orchestra in the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles during the 'thirties, Scott-Wood directed many dance and other popular instrumental recording sessions for the Regal Zonophone, HMV and Columbia labels. Judging by its records, Jay Whidden's band obviously had a flair for "hot" dance music and most of its records are interesting musically even today. One of them, a typically "cute" number of 1929, *A Dicky Bird Told Me So*, features a whole chorus on trumpet, played with tremendous attack and zest by an eighteen-year-old lad named Norman Payne. On hearing the side over thirty years after he made it, Norman Payne at once identified himself.

George Scott Wood and the Six Swingers recording in 1934.



At the time his regular work was at the Savoy with Fred Elizalde, the Spanish-American whom we met earlier in the chapter while discussing the other Savoy bands. Elizalde, now known as Federico Elizalde and as a composer of serious works, was in the late 'twenties in London known as "The Stormy Petrel of Jazz." Probably this was more because of his revolutionary musical ideas than because he was a bird of ill-omen, for the latter he certainly was not. He upset a good many appreciators that had stood still for too long while the goods they offered became over-ripe and even went rotten, so to speak, he was quite uncompromising about his aims at furthering the cause of "hot" dance music in a rather "way-out" form (to use present-day terminology), and yet he succeeded in renewing his contract with the hotel management while the more conventional Savoy Orpheans under Reggie Batten were not invited to return when their contract expired. As mentioned before, Elizalde arranged for three of the California Ramblers to play in his Savoy band; but the rest of it was composed of British musicians, and even before the formation of the half-Rambler-half-British unit, he employed entirely British artists for a few months (Jack Jackson was one of them). Norman Payne, playing second trumpet nightly alongside a man of the quality of Chelsea Quealey, one of the ex-Ramblers, not unnaturally absorbed at first hand some valuable experience to be added to his already considerable ability, and since Quealey would sometimes remember that though his own country was officially "dry," England was not, young Payne found himself with more work to do. On such occasions, Sylvester Ahola from the Savoy Orpheans would come and help out, and this did not exactly damage Norman Payne's technique either. He and his brother Lawrie, who played excellent alto and baritone saxes, were in great demand for recording dates by Carroll Gibbons and Ray Noble.

The Elizalde band gradually grew in size during the year 1928; a notable member of the team was the vocalist-guitarist, the late Al Bowlly, born in Lourenço Marques in 1898, and who arrived in London at Elizalde's invitation in July, 1928, from Germany, via Singapore and Calcutta. Adrian Rollini was sent home to New York in February, 1929 to find and bring back some more Americans to give the orchestra the exact sound Elizalde wanted. The men Rollini brought with him were Joseph "Fud" Livingston, a fine clarinet and tenor saxophone player who also wrote scores that in their advanced use of harmony were comparable to Elizalde's own, a young man aged twenty-three who had already worked with Ben Pollack in California and Chicago, and with Red Nichols in New York; Max Farley, late of Paul Whiteman's Orchestra, another fine arranger and a good clarinet, alto, tenor and flute player; and Rollini's own seventeen-year-old brother Arthur, also a good all-round saxophonist, but mostly interested in the tenor saxophone. This quartet of fine reed

players arrived in England on the *Berengaria* on March 15, 1929, and preparations proceeded for a concert to be given in the Shepherd's Bush Pavilion under the auspices of the *Melody Maker*, to take place on Sunday afternoon, June 23.

A touch of drama occurred when the compère, critic and at that time, Editor of the *Melody Maker*, the late Edgar Jackson, announced that owing to family illness, Fud Livingston and Chelsea Quealey had had to return to the States immediately, and would therefore not be appearing. It transpired that both had decided to return without giving either the sponsors or Fred Elizalde himself any reason for doing so. The situation was more than saved, says the eyewitness account in the magazine, by the splendid work done by Norman Payne on trumpet and Arthur Rollini on tenor. It was said that three thousand ticket-holders, who had come from Denmark, France and Belgium, as well as from all parts of the British Isles, gave the band a rapturous reception (particularly Adrian Rollini with his goofus), while outside, two thousand more had to be turned away.

The Rollini brothers returned to America at the end of 1929 after helping to make a film with Pola Negri, the Elizalde band supplying the music. By now, it was no longer in the Savoy Hotel, but touring; and in 1930, Elizalde disbanded. He remained in England for a few more years, fought in Spain in the Civil War, then settled down there to his composing of serious works. While still in London, however, Fred Elizalde wrote a very interesting article in the February, 1929 issue of *The Gramophone*. Under the heading, *Jazz - What Of The Future?* he deplored the narrow-minded prejudices that the average listener maintained towards "jazz," and explained that "hot playing is going to develop enormously . . . It does not mean putting on a yellow hat and trying to make more noise than your neighbour. It is merely the name given to the more advanced type of playing. . . . In my opinion, the orchestra that will play exclusively for dancing will become 'hotter' than ever. . . . Every year sees an increase in the popularity of the new type of 'hot' playing. I am not definitely opposed to melody, but to me it is an entirely secondary consideration as far as dance music is concerned. . . . I would urge musicians and anyone who is interested in modern musical thought to think of jazz as an art apart, and not in any way comparable to the classics."

The following month, the leader of the dance band at the May Fair Hotel, Bert Ambrose, took half a page in *The Gramophone* to answer some of the points made by the leader of the dance band at the Savoy. He agreed that playing "hot" was not a matter of noise, confirmed that it was difficult to play in that style, and said that only expert musicians could do so. Elizalde had said that future dance numbers should include changes of tempo from foxtrot to waltz to blues and so on, within the framework of a single piece. Ambrose rejected the suggestion that melody

was of secondary importance as absurd, and the change of tempo idea as impracticable. "If I tried it out at the May Fair Hotel," wrote Ambrose, "I feel certain that the floor would empty in a minute."

It is a fact of history now, of course, that Fred Elizalde's predictions did not come to pass, and that Ambrose, by recognizing what the greatest leaders and arrangers in the States were achieving by a successful blend of "hot" and "sweet" music, maintained a stronger, longer hold on popular esteem than did those who followed the uncompromising hard line suggested by Fred Elizalde. Something similar is to be seen today: the most popular "pop" groups are those that make the widest appeal by blending the "folk" origins of blues and country-and-western music with more commercial styles; the "underground" groups that reject anything but their own purist line rarely enjoy enormous or sustained success.

Nevertheless, Bert Ambrose had a band throughout the late 'twenties and up to the outbreak of war in 1939 that matched anything transatlantic, and was recognized at the time as having the most listenable, and probably as a result the most danceable band in England, even in Europe. Part of his secret lay in his choice of top-line musicians who could play anything put in front of them, and part lay in his arrangers, Bert Read and the late Lew Stone, and in the later 'thirties, Sid Phillips. All these knew the value of the "hot" style of arranging, but all recognized that it should not be carried to extremes - not in the ballroom of a hotel such as the May Fair, or even in a sophisticated night-club such as the Embassy, to which Ambrose returned in October, 1933. Ambrose still has a longer list of interesting "hot" recordings to his credit than any other British bandleader, but he also has a longer list of recordings of any sort than almost any other British bandleader!

One of the most prolific of recorders must surely be the late Billy Cotton. The father of the well-known BBC television producer of the same name, Billy Cotton was born in London in 1899, joined the army and became a drummer-boy at fourteen, served in the old Royal Flying Corps during World War I, and incidentally led his first band; after the war, he had another group at the Palais de Danse in Ealing. Three years later still, in 1924, he had a band at the Wembley Exhibition, and in various dance halls in London, Liverpool and Brighton. The first West End engagement was at Ciro's, where lately had been heard the bands of Debroy Somers and Harry Bidgood. We shall return to Billy Cotton's story in the next chapter, as like so many of the big names in British dance music, it belongs more to the 'thirties and after than to the 'twenties, but both Somers and Bidgood are very much of the late 'twenties.

When Debroy Somers handed the leadership of the Savoy Orpheans over to Ramon Newton in 1926, he formed his own orchestra, and with the aid of broadcasting and dozens of sessions for Columbia Records,



became very popular and his name well known. (He had directed sessions for the Vocalion label at the outset of its entry into the British record world in 1920, but apart from his name appearing as the conductor, and later on as the arranger of the famous Savoy Medleys, he had had little publicity. The medleys consisted of English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish and American folk songs woven in dance tempo into a mosaic of readily acceptable melody, and records of them, by his own and other bands, outsold by a comfortable distance almost every other dance record of the time. Undoubtedly the reason was that they appealed to older people, who would never buy a dance record of more up-to-date music, in addition to the younger ones who took them, almost literally, in their stride.)

Debroj Somers was born in Dublin in 1890, and studied at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. He made Edison Bell cylinders and other records as a teenager, but his best-known work in the studios was often under criticism from the more forward-looking critics as being too military. To some extent this is true, for his band played with impeccable precision but with a rather heavy rhythm; there are very few examples of even mildly "hot" playing among the large number recorded. (Although Columbia had exclusive rights to the name of the leader, this did not prevent him from entering into a short-term contract with the Vocalion company, his earlier employers, using the name of "Ciro's Club Dance Band, London, conducted by its famous director." A young man, too young to recall anything earlier than the mid-fifties but fascinated by the dance music of the 'twenties, recently wrote to me asking who the director was who was so famous that the record label did not name him!)

During the 'thirties, Debroj Somers and his band appeared in films such as *Aunt Sally* and *Stars On*

Parade. From 1936, such records as he made were mainly of the more patriotic type, or were of selections from musical shows, for which Somers often provided the accompaniment in the theatres themselves. He devoted more and more of his time to this work, and almost up to the time of his death in the late 'fifties he was conducting pit orchestras.

The leader at Giro's who took Debroj Somers' place, in the autumn of 1927, for a season was Harry Bidgood, a diminutive figure physically, but a major personality in British dance music. He was recording Manager of Vocalion at the time, and directed dozens of sessions (using mostly men from other bands with a nucleus of his own) for the inexpensive eight-inch Broadcast label, which was described with uncanny prescience, "The Long Playing Record." (In fact, it was only a small record with grooves packed more closely to the inch and reaching nearer the label than was usual on a ten-inch record. It could thus be made to play about as long as one of these more usual discs; the advantage lay in the fact that these eight-inch records could be stored in smaller bookshelves and boxes, and were obviously slightly lighter in weight, but this was outweighed by the deplorable loss of quality in the recording of the innermost part of the track.)

So that the name "Harry Bidgood" should not seem to monopolize the Broadcast record catalogue, some of his records were issued under such names as the Riverside Dance Band, the Midnight Merrymakers and the Kentucky Revellers. When Vocalion were taken over as a going concern by the Crystalate Manufacturing Company, both their Broadcast and Imperial labels respectively were dropped after a brief amalgamation, and Harry Bidgood, using the name of "Primo Scala" and appearing in the catalogues suitably dressed in Spanish national costume,

Left: Harry Bidgood and his Orchestra, 1927.

Right: Leslie Jeffries and his Rialto Orchestra, 1925. (They played "hot" dance music in Edinburgh.)

became the director of a massed accordion band that played popular dance tunes, frequently in selections of six choruses to a double-sided disc, with enormous success during the next two decades, right up to the time of his death in 1955. There was nothing in the least subtle about any of these; they were aimed at that section of the community that wanted the tune played absolutely straight, without embellishments or interesting arrangements. The same group recorded as "Don Porto's Novelty Accordion Band" and "Rossini's Accordion Band" for Woolworth's Eclipse (eight-inch) and Crown (nine-inch) records. Since their unsophisticated clientele were invariably also those whose pockets were shallow, it is small wonder that these records sold by the tens of thousands – as had the straightforward dance records on Broadcast before them.

The regular singer of the vocal refrains, always anonymous, on the Broadcast records was either the Irish tenor Cavan O'Connor, or the concert baritone John Thorne, frequently sounding badly miscast when providing lyrics to some of the more ridiculous songs of the day. He was a regular employee of the Aeolian (Vocalion) Company from its beginning, and also sang with its other principal dance band. This was one of the few that did not play in London during the late 'twenties, but which recorded there by commuting from its regular place of employment in Edinburgh. The leader was a violinist named Leslie Jeffries, later to abandon the dance music world for that of the Palm Court of the Grand Hotel, Eastbourne, but his Rialto Orchestra (named after the Coventry Street, London, ballroom where he started in the early 'twenties) from the Marine Gardens, Portobello, was a fine little band that frequently played even its comedy material with a much greater sense of what made interesting listening than did its contemporaries when playing versions of the same numbers. John Thorne attempting to sing *If We'd 'A Known You Was Gonna Come We'd 'A Surely Baked A Cake* in a perfectly modulated voice, obviously more at home singing songs such as *Off To Philadelphia* and *On The Road To Mandalay*, borders on the ludicrous. The band itself, though, provides an excellent early example of how an enthusiastic and technically able group of musicians can absorb all the best that their American colleagues could offer, and produce good dance music with an original flavour. The brass is particularly noteworthy, especially considering the record was made in 1924. Nor is it a lone example; there are many sides on the red and gold Aco label bearing the name of Jeffries' Rialto Orchestra that also bear fair comparison with the best of the top American names, some of them, such as *Hard-Hearted Hannah* and *That's All There Is* being of



such a high standard of musicianship, execution, imagination and arrangement that for years, collectors specializing in records of Fletcher Henderson and his Orchestra were convinced that these were by their hero, labelled as by Jeffries in error.

Small clubs and ballrooms demanded small bands, of course; it would have been pointless even if possible to accommodate a band the size of, say, Jack Hylton's or Paul Whiteman's, on a handstand about five yards wide and three deep. The Kit-Cat, the famous Mecca of visiting American bands at that time, was larger than this, but the resident British band under the direction of pianist Arthur Rosebery was only nine strong during most of its stay there at the end of the 'twenties. Despite its size, it was regarded by musicians and others who knew a good band when they heard one as one of the finest in London. Its star member was its trumpet and trombone player, Paul Fenoulhet, English but of Huguenot origin, who afterwards became leader and arranger of the BBC Variety Orchestra during the second world war. Like Ted Heath, of Ambrose's orchestra, Paul Fenoulhet was much in demand as trombonist on all kinds of recording sessions, and both these fine players recalled almost blushing having taken part in various recordings of *The Laughing Trombone*. Considering what an excellent band Arthur Rosebery's was, it recorded and broadcast comparatively little; about twenty or thirty sides for Parlophone accounted for them all.

The New Princes was another well-known restaurant where customers could dance. It was in Ficeddilly, London, and in the winter of 1925 its popular feature was a band of Canadian musicians including Bill Hall, who had come over with Joseph C Smith, and stayed. The leader was a saxophonist named Hal Swain, and in the sax team was another man who sang the vocals, sometimes in duet with Swain, sometimes alone. His name was Les Allen, and in the 'thirties he built up a big following among the British girls who worshipped crooners much as their daughters follow the fortunes of "pop" groups now. Hal Swain formed his own band on leaving the New Princes, and toured with this very successfully until the mid-thirties. It is believed he returned to Canada before the outbreak of the war; so far as is known, Les Allen did so as well.



The Ministry of Labour restrictions drove most of the American residents home after the spring of 1930, but the Staritas remained, and so did a saxophonist who came to London in 1923 to join the Savoy Havana Band after Bert Ralton left for his Australian and New Zealand tour. He was Van Phillips; and not only did he not return to America on the outbreak of war, but is living here to this day, a life devoted to music and the cause of those who entertain by it. For some years after the break-up of the old Havana Band, Van Phillips was in charge of musical arrangements in the Columbia recording studios in Petty France, by St James's Park. The records made under his own name are usually by musicians assembled for the purpose, and he also organized a neat little group called the Four Bright Sparks. This seldom featured anything in the nature of "hot" music, but it was an interesting band in that it consisted of Phillips himself on clarinet and alto saxophone, Arthur Young from Jack Hylton's band on piano, Len Fillis, a South African musician who had not long before partnered Al Bowlly on the halls, and Rudy Starita on drums and xylophone. Ted Heath appears on some titles, playing trombone of course, though the labels claim it is a trumpet!

The "hotter" type of dance music on Columbia records was provided by a group known as the Gilt-Edged Four. This featured Al Starita and his brother Ray (and sometimes Rudy as well), Len Fillis, pianist Sid Bright (part of the Bowlly-Fillis act) and, when there was a trumpet, this was played by Max Goldberg. This remarkable musician was born in Toronto, coming to London in 1924 and remaining there until 1946, since when little was heard of him until it was discovered he was the proprietor of a popular hotel in Melbourne, Australia! Max Goldberg was one of the most valuable assets to any band, and there were few indeed with which he never played. He was with the Savoy Havana Band in 1927, took Sylvester Ahola's place with Ambrose when "Hooley" returned home to America, in 1931; played with Al Collins at the Berkeley Hotel and Sydney Lipton at the Grosvenor House Hotel, and was in constant demand by recording managers such as Jay Wilbur and Ray Noble for strengthening their brass sections. "Hot" or sweet, straight and corny, it was one to him; he could play anything and did play everything. Recently he made an appearance on Australian television as the trumpeter in a small band accompanying some act; the band had the chance of a small solo spot, and Max Goldberg demonstrated cheerfully that he was still on top of his form.

As the period often referred to as the Golden Age

of the Bands drew to its close, there were signs that those who lived through it were beginning to realize that in other ways, they were living in a very pleasant era. The Kellogg Pact, outlawing war as an instrument of national policy, had been signed in The Hague in 1928; Germany had been admitted to the League of Nations, and the British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, claimed on the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Armistice of November 11, 1918, that the old wounds were healing. The American people began to feel that President Hoover's promise of two cars in every garage and two chickens in every pot was perhaps not just an idle dream. They began to play the stock markets rather as they might a game of cards – or perhaps roulette. There was reason for this. The growth in consumer goods had increased 93 per cent in the ten years since the end of the war, compared with 10 per cent in the decade from 1910 to 1919. Therefore what could be better than to invest in stocks that could – it seemed – only go one way: up? Slight recessions went unheeded; you bought at low prices and sold out again when the recession was over, it couldn't last long anyway, but in fact those who had bought low held on, hoping for more, better winnings at the end of the rainbow. The economy was dangerously over-expanding. Some wary souls wondered how much the balloon could take before it burst. When US Steel suddenly dropped from 261 points to 215, for no reason that anyone could understand, in the last week of September, 1929, it seemed just another golden chance to pick up some bargains . . . then sell when the stock rallied. But it did not rally, and other stocks did not rally either. On October 24, 1929, Steel was down to 103. By what became known forever as Black Tuesday, October 29, the great crash had happened. Like a mighty clap of thunder after a build-up of storm-clouds, the American prosperity balloon burst with a detonation that shook the world. One gramophone company's stock that had stood at 164 when the market opened that morning was down to three-quarters of a point by the end of trading.

Luxuries such as records were naturally the first to be hit; as Roland Gelatt puts it in his fascinating book, *The Fabulous Phonograph*, "Everything went into a decline, but the phonograph went into a tailspin." Paul Whiteman, the King of Jazz as his publicity agents had crowned him, had returned to California a week before the crash, to resume work on his much-discussed film of that name. He had taken his outside band west during the summer, adding to it Joe Venuti, the supreme "hot" violinist, and his old schoolmate and musical partner on hosts of records, Eddie Lang, born Salvatore Massaro in Philadelphia in 1903. With Bix Beiderbecke, Bill Rank, Frankie Trumbauer and now Venuti and Lang in the Whiteman entourage, with Bing Crosby to sing the vocals, it looked like an unbeatable combination. But Whiteman knew his value, and also perhaps his limitations.

Opposite: Top left: *Paul Fensholt.*

(MAM)

Top right: *Hal Swain.*

Bottom: *Arthur Rosebery and his Band (1929).*



When he found the script called for an acting part from him, he refused to sign the contract with Universal Pictures. Months of the summer went by while the lawyers and executives argued, and the Whiteman orchestra, vocalists and arrangers (which included Bill Challis) had a grand holiday in the Californian sunshine at Universal's expense. Finally, Whiteman decided, not unnaturally, that he would do better to take his band back east, until the difficulties had been sorted out. A short season at the Palais Royal, just outside New York, followed in late August, and there a British team of visitors, including Jack Hylton and his manager, and Edgar Jackson of *The Melody Maker*, saw and heard the Whiteman band. In the artists' room between shows, various members of the band recorded some speech and snatches of music on their respective instruments on a home recording machine that made quite reasonable impressions on aluminium discs. Bix Beiderbecke was one of those that spoke a few words, but the only known chance of preserving the voice of this young genius vanished during the blitz on London in 1941, when Edgar Jackson's entire collection of valuable records was destroyed by a land-mine.

With the national economy in the state it was in during the late autumn and winter of 1929-1930, Universal Pictures were in no mood to splash money around. So when *King Of Jazz* was finally produced, it consisted mostly of shots of members of the Whiteman band doing their party pieces. It had some excellent songs in the score, contributed by some of the country's leading songwriters - *It Happened In Monterey* (Mabel Wayne), and *I Like To Do Things For You* and *Song Of The Dawn* (Jack Yellen and Milton Ager). In case readers are not familiar with these names, perhaps I should explain that Mabel Wayne was also the composer of the sensational waltz ballad *Ramona*, which was one of the only two numbers ever recorded by the sultry Mexican film star Dolores del Rio, and that Jack Yellen and Milton Ager between them had by that time already had enormous successes with *Ain't She Sweet?*, *My Pet*, *Is She My Girl Friend?* and *Hard-To-Get* *Gertie*, among others.

Left: Eddie Lang and Joe Venuti.

Above: The Casa Loma Orchestra.

Mention of the name Eddie Lang prompts a closer look at the all-too-short career of this outstanding musician. He was originally trained as a violinist, and shared a music-stand in the school orchestra with Joe Venuti. While still in his teens, he secured a position in a restaurant called L'Aiglon in Philadelphia. That was in 1922; the following year he joined Charlie Kerr's little-known orchestra as a violinist, but took up the banjo and guitar while with Kerr, and the smart sound of Kerr's rhythm section as perpetuated on the old quarter-inch-thick Edison Diamond Discs is due principally to Eddie Lang's banjo work.

In the early spring of 1924, Brunswick released a novelty record by a trio from St Louis called the Mound City Blue Blowers. It consisted of an ex-jockey named William "Red" McKenzie humming through paper and comb, Dick Slevin humming into a kazoo - one of those submarine-shaped metal devices with a hole covered by a thin membrane which is made to vibrate and so amplify the voice - and Jack Bland on banjo. Eddie Lang joined this odd little group late in 1924, and actually came to London with it, opening in the cabaret in the Ficcadilly Hotel on April 1, 1925.

Returning to the States, Lang rejoined Charlie Kerr briefly, then spent some time in the orchestra directed by Roger Wolfe Kahn, at the same time making records with Jean Goldkette's principal orchestra, under the latter's name and that of Frankie Trumbauer.

He spent a year with Paul Whiteman, and can be seen and heard with Joe Venuti in *King Of Jazz* as they play part of a brilliant number they composed some years before, called *Wild Cat*. When Whiteman returned to New York after the film was completed, he found that the prevailing economic conditions simply would not allow him to carry the band at the strength of happier times, and Venuti and Lang were among those with whose services Whiteman dispensed.

Eddie Lang had struck up a great friendship with Bing Crosby, however, and when Bing came east in

1931, he insisted that Eddie Lang be made a permanent member of his entourage, and that the guitar player on all records Bing made must be Eddie Lang. It was a wise choice, apart from being a friendly gesture; for sheer richness of sound, inventive and imaginative phrasing and immaculate good taste, there has never been a dance-band guitarist to come within reach of Eddie Lang. His great musicianship was matched by his extraordinary versatility. Fortunately for us, he was regularly employed by Columbia Records, who also made OKeh records, famous for their issues designed to appeal to the coloured race. Thus, we can, if we are fortunate enough to possess the records, hear Eddie Lang accompanying singers from Annette Hanshaw and Ruth Etting to blues singers Bessie Smith and Texas Alexander. He made solo guitar records and worked with Frank Ferera's Hawaiian Trio; with Joe Venuti's Blue Four, and Louis Armstrong; with the great negro composer and publisher, pianist and bandleader Clarence Williams and his wife Eva Taylor, and with blues guitarist Lonnie Johnson. (He used the pseudonym "Blind Willie Dunn" when working with Johnson. Legend has it that Willie Dunn was a blind newsboy from whom Eddie Lang bought his evening paper every night; for the use of his name, Lang turned over his fee from the records to the little negro boy.)

Bing Crosby, in the spring of 1929, developed a wart on his vocal chords and had it removed, proceeding to sing even better than ever; and when Eddie Lang complained of recurrent tonsillitis a few years later, Bing advised him to have his tonsils out. Complications set in, and on March 26, 1933, Eddie Lang died, aged barely thirty. At this writing, both his partners, Bing Crosby and Joe Venuti, are still very much alive, Joe Venuti being the individual musician who drew the greatest applause when he appeared at the Jazz Expo '69 in London in October, 1969.

A little earlier in this chapter, we saw that Jean Goldkette managed several bands other than the one with which he made his name, which included Bix Beiderbecke, Bill Rank, Frankie Trumbauer and others. There was McKinney's Cotton Pickers, already mentioned; and towards the end of 1928, he sent another band whose affairs he managed to a hotel in Toronto, Canada. The band was originally known as the Orange Blossom Band, but the hotel was the Casa Loma, and when it went bankrupt a few months later, Goldkette sent the band on tour under a new name: the Casa Loma Orchestra. As a sign of the outwardly prosperous times, it was registered as a company, Casa Loma Orchestra, Inc. The board of directors consisted of the ten men in the band, each with an equal share in the profits, the chairman being the leader, Glen Gray, and the secretary and treasurer was Pat Davis, both of them saxophonists. The affairs of the band were thus run on business lines; they were not

the first group of musicians to work in this manner, as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band had an exactly similar arrangement, with Nick LaRocca as the chairman of course.

The Casa Loma men were very successful; they played mostly in the New York area at the outset of their career, at such venues as the Glen Island Casino, and at Essex House. Their style of playing was something new to the world of dance music at that time: though some of their arrangements were done by Bill Challis, mostly their repertoire was contributed by members of the organisation themselves, principally by Gene Gifford, the guitarist, who arranged with a precision and skill that attracted many admirers, but which, in the light of later developments in the dance-band world, and changing tastes among jazz enthusiasts, seem almost as pretentious in their way as some of Paul Whiteman's did.

The Casa Loma Orchestra continued its triumphant career up to the time of the entry of the United States into the second world war; it then became more or less a war casualty, although for a time Glen Gray continued with a somewhat different band of his own. He died in 1963.

It has been said that the Casa Loma Orchestra, with their smartly-drilled sound from brass and reed sections were the founding-fathers of the "swing" craze that came in the mid-thirties. Certainly there is good reason for this as shown by the vigorous approach, and the use of "riffs" – repeated phrases by either or both sections of the band, with or without a soloist apparently improvising. Frequently a musician, having worked out a variation in his mind, would use that variation every time the number was played, unlike the men of the 'twenties who as often as not played something different every time. (One has only to compare different "takes" of a Paul Whiteman or Jean Goldkette performance, recorded on the same occasion, and used impartially by the company for pressing its records, to understand this. Neither Bix Beiderbecke nor Frankie Trumbauer seem able to play any solo exactly the same way twice.) With the "swing" bands, however, this seems to be much less prevalent, and to a sensitive listener, it sounds as if what is played is not so much inspired as trotted out like a clever party-piece. To be sure, there were exceptions, but they were far fewer than had been general a decade or so earlier.

The first recording session undertaken by the Casa Loma Orchestra was under the direction of Henry Biagini, as Glen Gray was still a member of the saxophone team. The date was Tuesday, October 29, 1929, and as the band left the OKeh studios, having made three sides, the evening papers were full of the story of what had happened on Wall Street that day. The last of the three titles the band had made was just a catchy tune from *Charing Cross*, one of those new all-talking, all-singing movies. It was called *Happy Days Are Here Again*.

4 The clouds will soon roll by

Harry Woods was an American song-writer who had scored a great success in 1927 with a song of marital fidelity that epitomized wholesome, happy life. It was called *Side By Side*; every band and most vocalists had recorded it, from Paul Whiteman (with Bing Crosby singing and Red Nichols playing an ingenious variation on the verse, solo) to Aileen Stanley, one of the most popular cabaret artists of international fame. As the 'thirties entered their second year, and the great depression, the worst in most living memories, ground on inexorably as if it would never end, Harry Woods came up with a song that caught the mood perfectly. *The Clouds Will Soon Roll By* became a catch-phrase, and it too was soon being recorded by every band and singer, and by now, the cinema organist had established himself as a major factor in popular entertainment. There are recordings of the number by various exponents of the mighty Wurlitzer.

But 1932 was not a year for recording in America. Disenchanted with the business of changing needles and winding up the spring motor, lacking funds to buy the bare necessities of life in many, many cases, the American public took radio to its heart and tossed its phonographs and records into the furnaces. They made quite reasonable substitutes for coal. The army of unemployed hunger-marched to Washington, or sold apples, two for a nickel (five cents) in the streets. Under these conditions, you didn't feel disposed to pay 75 cents for a couple of dance tunes you could hear played on the radio by much the same bands as on records, and unlike records, it was free once you had bought the set and installed it. If someone else bought the radio and invited you round to listen to it and maybe dance to the music it played, so much the better.

The mood of the nation was not all expressed by calmly optimistic songs such as the one that gives its title to this chapter, however. To be sure, there were those who firmly believed that "Prosperity is just around the corner," and to do their best to ensure it, voted Franklin Delano Roosevelt as President in the election in November that year (the phrase quickly became twisted sardonically into "Posterity is just

around the corner," of course); but there were many more, especially among those who, only a matter of fifteen brief years before, had fought in France in the belief that they were making the world safe for democracy, who were embittered by the turn of events that had made cynical nonsense of their efforts, or so it seemed. For them, a dirge-like minor-key song that was quite unlike any other struck a loud response. EY Harburg and Jay Gorney wrote many quite successful songs, but their *Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?* has taken its place in the annals of twentieth-century popular song as perhaps the most socially significant number of them all. Bing Crosby made a most appealing record of it, Rudy Vallée scored as much of a success with it as any Columbia recording artist (this company was sold by its British head office to an American refrigerator company that promptly went bust), and there were moderate sales for a record of it by Leo Reisman and his Orchestra.

This organization had been formed as long ago as 1920, and its policy was that of strictly sweet dance music, suitable more as background to a dinner at a table for two. (Irving Berlin wrote *Soft Lights And Sweet Music* in 1932; it was featured in a Broadway show called *Face The Music*, which also featured a cheerful ditty called *Let's Have Another Cup O' Coffee*.) During the 'twenties, the Reisman orchestra and its soft muted brass, silky-toned saxophones and crooning fiddles had been quite successful; it came into its own in the early 'thirties, for the mood of which it was ready-made. Leo Reisman, who died in 1961, disliked jazz and made no secret of it; it is all the stranger, then, to find that several of his records he made in 1930 and 1931 have solos in "jungle" style, played by James "Bubber" Mile, a gifted negro trumpet player who was one of the principal attractions of Duke Ellington's orchestra at the Cotton Club not long before. His scathing comments by means of his trumpet, muted with a rubber plunger, complement magnificently the distasteful lyrics of *Pattie' On The Ritz*.

To the general public, those that were inclined to buy records at all, Reisman offered much less inter-



Above: Leo Reisman.



Right: Jack Payne and the BBC Dance Orchestra (1929). [BBC]

esting fare from the connoisseur's viewpoint – until we consider his vocalists. These included such names as Lee Wiley, one of the first girl singers to appear regularly with a band (Reisman played then at the Central Park Casino; Miss Wiley had been a member of the chorus of a film called *The Sazdust Paradise* in the earliest days of "talkies"); Harold Arlen, the song-writer who made a fortune from *Stormy Weather*, and sang it on Leo Reisman's record in 1933; Fred Astaire, still with a Hollywood career ahead of him and at that time appearing on Broadway in *The Band Wagon*, and Reisman himself. As a vocalist he was an excellent bandleader. One of his late-twenties records had a piano solo passage by a young man named Eddy Duchin. At the time this was made, Reisman's Orchestra was playing at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, which had never employed any band that committed the anarchy of playing what its members liked rather than what the composer had written. Nevertheless, the quiet, almost somnolent character of Duchin's piano work fitted its musical context and its physical surroundings perfectly. In 1933 he left Reisman and formed his own small unit for the Central Park Casino, and with the return a year or two later of more settled economic conditions, he made a considerable success with this. When the war broke out, Duchin enlisted in the US Navy; he returned to music after demobilization, but contracted leukaemia and died in 1951. He was forty-two. As with Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman and the Dorsey Brothers, Hollywood admitted him – in his case, posthumously – into the

select company of bandleaders whose lives made good scripts for films.

In England, hit by the Depression but less severely than the United States, the songs of good cheer were more readily acceptable than those that frankly begged for charity. Edgar Jackson, writing a review of the records of *Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?* in *The Gramophone*, described the Americans rather unkindly as loving to make their misfortunes "an occasion for an orgy of public wallowing, which enables every calamity to be turned to account by the bards of Tin Pan Alley. . . . Where they expect the 'Brother' to get it (the dime) from, I don't know, as everyone is supposed to be in the same state. Perhaps they are hoping for more War Debt payments." To a nation that had produced *Pack Up Your Troubles In Your Old Kit-Bag* in the darkest days of the first world war, the uplifting sentiments of *The Clouds Will Soon Roll By* made a much more immediate appeal. Noël Coward had a song in 1932 that had nothing to do with the state of things, but its title seemed to sum up the position: *The Party's Over Now*, from the same revue as his better-known number, *Mad Dogs And Englishmen*, which amply demonstrates the British love of laughing at themselves. Sir Noël's comment on the way things were in the earliest 'thirties appears in the caustic finale number in his spectacular musical *Cavalcade*: it was called *Twentieth-Century Blues*, but it made no attempt to tug at the heartstrings. It was simply a matter-of-fact, slightly cynical observation of the "strange illusion, chaos and confusion" of those days. The author's own record of it was never released, but there was one by Jack Payne and his BBC Dance Orchestra on which Jack himself declaimed – one cannot say "sang" – the refrain in a tongue-in-cheek parody of Ted Lewis at his most dramatic. It was a most hilarious offering,

as were quite a number by this most famous band of the earlier 'thirties.

It was so famous because it could be heard at the flick of a switch, broadcasting from London (2LO, Savoy Hill) every weekday afternoon at five, for an hour. The show included every kind of musical presentation short of major symphonic works, from Ravel's *Bolero* (somewhat edited, but with its original flavour carefully maintained) to knockabout comedy of the *Fire! Fire!! Fire!!!* and *Sergeant Flagg And Sergeant Quirt* variety. The band was the regular BBC organization, and the programme was arranged and compered by Jack Payne himself. He sang some of the vocal refrains in a quiet, rather high tenor voice, with perfect enunciation in the manner of the time, and took part in the comedy sketches that were usually included in the "variety novelties" as they were called. In the first number, he was the dim-witted North Country fire-chief; in *Sergeant Flagg And Sergeant Quirt* he was the swaggering American Sergeant Flagg, forever at loggerheads over some girl with his rival Quirt (played by Bob Busby, at that time, 1930, the pianist in the band); in *Skin-a-mo-link The Sergeant* he was the typical British opposite number to Sergeant Flagg, and in *My Brother Makes The Noises For the Talkies*, he played an irascible American movie director while his principal vocalist, Billy Scott-Coomber, who specialized in romantic ballads as a rule, played most of the "parts" in the ludicrously "hammy" action.

So popular was Jack Payne and the BBC Dance Orchestra from the moment of their first broadcast as such on March 2, 1928, that they were given an exclusive recording contract with Columbia records, and in April, 1930, they appeared for the first time on any stage in the London Palladium. Of their first broadcast, the *Melody Maker* critic commented: "Despite a limited opportunity for rehearsal (it) gave a satisfactory performance, notwithstanding the fact that for musicians who have been used to playing before large and crowded audiences to find themselves with nothing more appreciative than four walls is neither the most inspiring nor the most helpful of environments. . . . As to style, the band will necessarily have to be on the 'straight' side, but the leader intends that it shall nevertheless feature good and up-to-date dance rhythm."

The latter promise was kept. Jack Payne and his BBC Dance Orchestra, by reason of their conditions of employment, could not feature as much "hot" music, which is the essence of any good dance-band performance, as they and their leader would have liked, as their audience of unseen and almost incalculable millions were in the main of provincial and Philistine outlook; the same writer in his remarks on the first broadcast noted that "provincial listeners . . . are still rather lacking in the ability to appreciate this type of modern dance music." Nevertheless, the repertoire included such numbers as *Hot And Heavy*, *Hot Bricks*, *Jazz Me Blues* and a curious affair called

No Parking, and popular songs such as *She's My Slip Of A Girl* (written by a 22-year-old bank clerk who won a *Melody Maker* competition with it) and *I Wanna Go Places And Do Things* were recorded without vocal work at all, instead showcasing the talents of some of the individual members of the front line. (The number *Love For Sale*, by Cole Porter, was also recorded without a vocal, due to the ban by the Lord Chamberlain on the public performance of lyrics that were considered unsuitable for the great British public. They were concerned with prostitution. The result of the ban was that there were no vocal versions recorded in England, although some had the melody hummed by either a soloist or two or three members of the band. Those not wishing to submit to this incredible dictatorship simply imported American versions such as Waring's *Pennsylvanians* or Libby Holman's. It is not generally thought that the purchasers of these records were suddenly and irrevocably corrupted thereby.)

Jack Payne employed many arrangers; at first he prepared his own scores, then his original pianist Bert Read took over this work. A year after beginning his term at Savoy Hill, Jack Payne engaged the services of Ray Noble, as mentioned in Chapter 2, and so acquired a talent that far outran practically all other British dance-band arrangers.

Ray Noble was born in Brighton, Sussex, in 1907. He began studying piano at the age of ten, but at fifteen, he began teaching himself what he wanted to know about modern dance-band orchestration and arranging, by careful study of the most suitable gramophone records. In April, 1926, he entered a competition in the *Melody Maker*, then in its fourth month of publication, to arrange and orchestrate a number called *There'll Come A Sometime*, which as a tune meant little at the time and nothing since; but so outstandingly original was his method of dealing with it that the July issue announced that he had been awarded the first prize of £10, a worthwhile sum in those days. The adjudicators' comments are worth noting: the four judges were Debroy Somers, Bert Ralton, Percival Mackey (a well-known London dance-band pianist who conducted the pit-orchestras for such very successful London productions as *No, No, Nanette* and *Lady, Be Good*) and the popular songwriter, Horatio Nicholls (alias Lawrence Wright, the publisher). "We have in him a man who should go a long way," they wrote. "While never having lost the essential predominance of the melody and a good balance of rhythm, simply and correctly obtained, he has introduced consistently an excellent form of harmony based on the modern school. His arrangement is clean and colourful. . . . His orchestration is distinctly practical from a commercial point of view, inasmuch as there are no difficult and intricate passages for individual instruments, neither are there complex rhythms nor effects scored against each other which could blur the cleanliness of the rendering."

The biographical note alongside this eulogy gave Ray Noble's age then as thirty-two, when in fact he was only nineteen; he was already leader of a band which, said the report, he had disbanded "in order to commence building up a larger and more ambitious unit with which he hopes to do big things in the future."

Nothing more was heard of the "larger and more ambitious unit," but its leader certainly achieved his object of doing big things. His attachment to the BBC Dance Orchestra (of which more later) lasted until the summer of 1929, when he was given the position of assistant recording director of HMV to Carroll Gibbons. Between them, these two fine musicians produced some of the finest dance music ever recorded anywhere, far in advance of almost all American performances and without equal in this country apart from the scores being used by Ambrose, which were the work of the late Lew Stone (whom we shall also meet later on). The dance records directed by Ray Noble were originally issued under the name of the New Mayfair Dance Orchestra, then as Ray Noble and his New Mayfair Dance Orchestra, eventually simply as Ray Noble and his Orchestra. There had been a Mayfair (Dance) Orchestra on HMV since the pre-1914 era, directed by various conductors, among them James Sale (the musical director of the London Palladium) and George W. Byng. Both these were very much musicians of the old school, and their attempts to conduct a fairly large orchestra in commercial ragtime and *soi-disant* "jazz" numbers are hilariously funny without intending to be. The name was dropped for most of the 'twenties, and it was not until 1928 that it was revived in its "New" form.

Ray Noble continued to compose numbers of his own. He had been writing songs since before his success in the contest (the number chosen for this was not his), and in 1929 scored quite a success with *Nobody's Fault But Your Own*. Later, in 1931, came *I'll Be Good Because Of You*, and a song which proved the rightness of the words of the judges in the contest five years before, that here was a man who should go a long way. It was *Goodnight, Sweetheart*, and its construction bore all the hallmarks mentioned by those same judges. To these qualities was added a lyric that expressed simple, sweet sentiment that struck home to listeners the world over: Bing Crosby had a tremendously successful record of it, and to this day, forty years later, it remains a popular signing-off number at dances not exclusively designed to attract teenagers. Ray Noble followed this up with a song that might be regarded as the second chapter in the love story: having established his characters as unmarried but meeting frequently, in *By The Fireside* he had married them happily. Two years later, in 1934, he wrote *The Very Thought Of You*, which, he says, "has a lyric as sincere as I could make it," and it so moved his principal vocalist, Al Bowlly, that he would sing it, and turn away from the microphone with



Top: Ray Noble and the New Mayfair Orchestra recording in 1931.

Above: Ray Noble and his Orchestra in Holland (1934).

tears in his eyes. Ray Noble followed these with *It's All Forgotten Now*, and coincidentally with his own and other records appearing on the market, he made the trip to New York to form and direct a band there. He could not take British musicians for the purpose, but with him went Bill Harty, his drummer, and Al Bowlly.

In New York, Ray Noble lost no time in forming

and rehearsing a superb band that by its performances bore all the Noble trade-marks. Among the better-known men he employed were Glenn Miller on trombone and Claude Thornhill on piano. Both became or were already known as fine arrangers in their own right. Sylvester Ahola, who had taken part in many Noble recording dates in England between 1928 and 1930, was on hand on one in New York, backing Al Bowly as the featured soloist with principal billing on the label. Bowly also sang most of the vocals on Ray Noble's American records, and showed that Britain could produce a rival to Bing Crosby. Noble continued with his policy of carefully balancing his programmes to suit all tastes, and when his "hot" records were issued by Victor, at that time the American opposite number to HMV, they proved that anything an American arranger could do, Ray Noble could do it just as well, even better – and the Americans, to their credit, admitted this. His English recordings had been issued by Victor during the Depression, and had sold when other, native bands' records were barely moving over the counters. To a great extent it was this success that led to Ray Noble's being invited to New York.

In 1935, he and his American band appeared in a film, *The Big Broadcast Of 1936*, for which he wrote the principal success, *Why Stars Come Out At Night*. A year later, Ray Noble and Al Bowly visited London; they returned to America in September, 1936, but Bowly returned to England a few weeks later. They never worked together again; Bowly was killed in the blitz on London on April 17, 1941, by which time, Ray Noble had long since been established in Los Angeles with another fine band and Tony Martin – then billed as Anthony Martin – as his principal vocalist. While in Los Angeles, Ray Noble composed *I Hadn't Anyone Till You*, which enjoyed considerable success and has remained popular, then set to work on a suite for dance band, each number being a beautifully drawn picture in sound of Red Indian tribes. There were the *Comanche War Dance*, *Iroquois*, *Sioux War*, *Sevinole* and *Cherokee*. The last-named made the greatest immediate impact, and is still the most popular. It is said that it was this number that formed the initial concept of the curiously angular form known as "hop" that had a brief vogue in certain jazz circles in the mid-forties, when one of the founders of the style, the late Charlie Parker, the alto saxophonist, took the first steps towards formulating the idiom by improvising on the harmonies of the number.

Ray Noble was personally a great success in the States. His bearing was that of the popular American idea of an English gentleman, and many listeners to the very popular Edgar Bergen-Charlie McCarthy show will remember his brief appearances in a speaking rôle as himself, apart from the superb musical backings he provided for the guests. One of his most famous appearances on this programme was with the late "Fats" Waller, a few days before the latter's

untimely death. After a grand build-up from Edgar Bergen, Ray Noble was introduced to Fats, who had appeared in England with enormous (that is the word) success a few months before the outbreak of war in 1939. Waller assumed what he thought was an upper-crust English accent, then appeared completely floored when Ray Noble returned the greeting with the immortal words, delivered in perfect Oxford-English, "Well, if it isn't Fats Waller – lay that mess on me, man!" As *Punch* would have said some decades earlier, collapse of stout party.

There were other examples over the years of Ray Noble's sense of humour. He composed such original comedy numbers as *The Haunted House* (in which he played the part of the host of a haunted house warning his guest of the phenomenon and calmly abandoning him to whatever might befall him), and he devised all kinds of novelty records in addition to the more usual dance items, musical comedy selections and backings to all kinds of singers and solo instrumentalists. He made various trips home to England after the war, finally retiring to the Channel Islands.

Ray Noble also wrote the entire score for the film *Say It With Music*, except the title number, of course, which Irving Berlin had written in 1921 for one of his *Music Box Reviews*. The film was British; it was made in 1932, and its principal attraction was Jack Payne and his Band, who thus re-enter our story. By this time, Jack Payne had left the BBC and taken a new band on tour; he had also terminated his contract with Columbia records and signed with the Crystalate Record Manufacturing Company, who made Imperial records, as well as the special Woolworth's brands, and who had absorbed Vocalion. The acquisition of a star of the magnitude of Jack Payne for records costing half as much as Columbia was a sensation, and Imperial made the most of it. To this day, Jack Payne's Imperial records are the only ones ever issued in England bearing the artist's photograph and facsimile signature on the label. (In America, Paul Whiteman's Columbia records of 1928–1930, bore a garish label in green, orange, pale blue and white, with black lettering, to distinguish them from the quiet good taste of the glossy black and gold of the other Columbia artists, and a rather hideous caricature of Whiteman appeared on the left-hand side. When these had been on the market for about a year, it was decided to elevate the other Columbia star leader to the distinction of a special label, and so Ted Lewis's records were issued with silver labels printed in black and embodying a drawing of the High-Hatted Tragedian of Jazz, hat and all. Records issued in England of the Ink Spots, Grace Moore, Irene Dunne and certain Bing Crosby titles bore pictures of these artists, and some records by Arthur Tracy ("The Street Singer") had his facsimile signature. As the photograph replaced the "crown" trade-mark that appeared on all other Imperial records, it was commented in the press at the time that

Jack Payne had not merely been elevated to the peerage, but had even displaced the Crown itself!

Before leaving the BBC, Jack Payne and the band made further appearances on stage, and this writer can clearly recall having seen them at the London Palladium (to be exact, on August 6, 1931). One of the most popular tunes of that summer season was a composition worked out by Frankie Trumbauer and his viola- and violin-playing colleague in Paul Whiteman's orchestra, Matt Malneck. Originally it had no words, and the subsequent addition of these was a matter of attempting to gild the lily, for the title and the music told the story, or painted the picture, more than adequately for even the most limited intelligence to grasp. It was called *Choo Choo*, and it was a much more lively and impressive affair than Duke Ellington's 1924 attempt at playing with trains, using the same name. (His subsequent *Daybreak Express*, of 1933 vintage, was much more interesting.) The Trumbauer recording was excellent, but no less so was the recorded and broadcast performance by the BBC Dance Orchestra. I well remember the thrilling climax to the programme of numbers I had heard the band play every night for some weeks - I listened avidly every time it broadcast, and would sooner have missed a meal than miss Jack Payne - as the impression of the increasing rhythmic movement of the piston-rods gave place to the display of a gigantic American locomotive when the curtains parted, and the huge engine seemed to charge out of the backdrop as if into the very stalls where I was sitting. Enscorced

on various parts of the front of the engine were the members of the band, playing for all they were worth, which to their audience was incalculable in terms of popularity.

The very next day, the band was in the Columbia studios recording such numbers as *Ain't That The Way It Goes?* which for sheer attack on the part of every man playing rivals the finest American negro bands of the time; there was even a short "hot" violin passage by Eric Siday, Britain's Joe Venuti, who later settled in America, directing film music in Hollywood. Such magnificent recordings were getting fewer and fewer, however, as public taste veered away from what the French were beginning to term "le hot," and sought consolation for their slumping spirits in a slumping economy in escapist sentimentalism. No one can blame them for this; as Ray Noble and Lew Stone demonstrated in hundreds of records, the emotions can be expressed tenderly and sweetly without overloading the mental system with sugar. Rich orchestration need not be nauseating. Jack Payne, however, once signed with Imperial records, proceeded to turn out dance records which were that and little more. There were many Columbias of considerable interest for their arrangements and solo work; the Imperials of similar quality are very few indeed. They were made to appeal to casual purchasers in chain-stores who wanted just the tunes, and when Crystalate abandoned their Imperial label in 1934 and transferred its artists whose contracts were still unexpired to the new Rex ("The King of Records") at one shilling, Jack Payne and his band were those so treated - and no pictures or signatures on the labels.

The band made another film, *Sunshine Ahead*, and

Henry Hall and the BBC Dance Orchestra (1932).

(BBC





Henry Hall and the BBC Dance Orchestra (1934).

(BBC

signature tune *Say It With Music* was heard for the last time, and on March 15, his successor, Henry Hall, assumed leadership of the new resident broadcasting orchestra. This genial, bespectacled musician was born in Clapham, London, in 1899, and though trained for a Civil Service career, he studied music in his spare time at the Guildhall School of Music.

While in his early twenties, he was put in charge of the musical arrangements in the Midland Hotel in Manchester, and later the Gleneagles Hotel Orchestra, with which he broadcast and recorded in 1924. He was director of several dance bands at the time of his appointment as Jack Payne's successor, and his taking up of this position coincided with the move from Savoy Hill to Langham Place, where the head offices of the BBC are to this day.

The *Melody Maker* critic (who had, incidentally, always used the *nom-de-plume* "Detector") had this to say about the debut of the new band: "The Band: Well-rehearsed and balanced. Sax section well together. Frankie Wilson [trumpet, late of Jack Payne] capable of standing up to all the hard work imposed upon him . . . another trumpet at least badly wanted. Rhythm section only ordinary, but pianist is very competent and reliable without being at all dazzling. . . . Arrangements excellent of their type . . . routinized without pretentiousness or vulgarity. By far the best aspect of the broadcast. Rhythm conspicuous by its absence. Entertainment value very limited, judging from this first half-hour. Personality almost nil. General - inoffensively negative." The critic continued to assert that he was pretty sure that Henry

in 1936 went on a tour of South Africa. A few months later, in May, 1937, the members were given a fortnight's notice that Jack Payne was retiring from stage work to concentrate on stock-breeding on his Buckinghamshire farm. But the dance music world was in his blood; by the following January he had formed a new band, was recording on the more expensive Decca label, and when the second war came, he entertained the services extensively. After it was over, Jack Payne noted the changes that had come over the music scene, and once more quit, this time for good. He made a few more sides, all for HMV, before retiring, among them a light concert piece called *El Alamein Concerto*, featuring his wife, Peggy Cochrane, the famous and very versatile pianist. He had his own television show for some years, ran an artists' agency, tried his hand at managing a hotel, but with only moderate success. It just was not his true line of country. A perfectionist and deeply appreciative of anyone or anything that seemed to him as near perfect as makes no odds, he was a generous friend to those in need - too much so for his own good, for financial troubles began to pile up. On December 4, 1969, Jack Payne died, aged 70, in obscurity.

But reverting to happier times for Jack Payne; it was announced in January, 1932 that he was going to leave the position in the BBC which he had held for four years, and take a band on tour. At the same time as he changed recording companies, the famous

Hall was not to blame for the generally disappointing results, but that he was "working to orders and compelled to 'yes' the despots behind the scenes." Whether this was true or not is of no consequence now, of course, but the fact remains that after a huge build-up in *The Radio Times* and such parts of the lay press that deigned to notice such things in those days, the new BBC Dance Orchestra did seem to lack something – some sparkle, attack, vitality, call it what you will – that had been such a feature while Jack Payne was in command. (One cannot imagine a man with a vigorous personality such as his "yessing" anyone, despot or otherwise. This is not to decry Henry Hall in any way, but simply to point out that there could hardly have been a greater difference between the two personalities. The critic already quoted remarked that he could well imagine the legion of Jack Payne fans sighing for the return of their idol. He was right, as far as I was concerned, if I may allow another personal reminiscence to intrude. Although only a schoolboy at the time, I knew the difference between the best kind of dance music, which used the "hot" idiom as flavouring as an expert chef uses pepper, and the more ordinary kind, which did not. Payne belonged to the first category; Hall to the second. I gave up listening avidly to teatime dance music, probably much to the relief of my parents; the first-class late-night programmes by Ambrose and others were long after my bedtime, indeed I was only allowed to stay up to hear Henry Hall as a special treat, and as I could not afford to buy top quality "hot" dance records on my pocket-money, I had to wait until my economic position had altered considerably for the better. By that time, the days of a resident BBC Dance Orchestra were over long ago, and I was catching up on what I had missed by buying it second-hand, considerably more cheaply than when it was new.)

Our friend "Detector" also raised the point about Henry Hall's use of two signature tunes, one to cue him in, the other to play him out. Jack Payne had used one, and was incidentally the first British dance-band leader to do so at all. He continued to use it in his stage shows, of course; Henry Hall's band came in with *It's Just The Time For Dancing* and out with *Here's To The Next Time*, which he wrote himself. It was a much more catchy number than the one that introduced each programme, and has remained in the public memory. *It's Just The Time For Dancing* was written by Eric Little, music by Roger Eckersley, a BBC official (his exact position was Director of Programmes), and "Detector" took exception to the fact that the royalties arising from the inevitably persistent playing of these two numbers would go to people who were not professional song-writers, to the financial detriment of those who were. "Even one of those young, unknown and struggling British writers might have produced a bright idea and have been given a chance of fame and fortune at last, but for Mr

Eckersley's song being given the preference," wailed "Detector," going on in the next paragraph to express his sorrow that the point should have arisen, "as it will have resulted in the first of the major embarrassments which will confront Henry Hall in his new career. . . . When he was at Cleneagles, he was his own master. Now he is the slave of the public."

It does seem odd, to say the least, that any responsible critic should assume that somewhere in England in the early months of 1932, living in obscurity from which presumably he never emerged, there was a young, unknown and struggling British song-writer of sufficient genius to be able to create a melody catchy enough for one of the best known of British band-leaders to use as a signature tune, his hopes of fame and fortune blasted at a stroke through the use of an excellent number from the pen of Mr Hall himself, and one from another BBC employee. Perhaps Irving Berlin should have been co-opted to write something suitable and so keep the royalties flowing in the same direction as in the Jack Payne era.

However, six months after the initial broadcast, Henry Hall recorded two titles that must have earned untold wealth in royalties for their fortunate composers. For the Christmas trade that year, and in an attempt to follow in the comedy steps of his predecessor, he directed the band in two more "variety novelties." One of these was *The Teddy Bears' Picnic*, a charming American number originally written in 1908 by JW Bratton, who specialized in lighthearted programme music, and without lyrics. The BBC Dance Orchestra version included words that have become near-immortal, and the use of instruments ranging from xylophone to tuba combined with technical excellence made the side ideal for test purposes by BBC engineers when called in to repair record players in the studios or the Gramophone Department. Hundreds of copies must have been used in this fashion, apart from the enormous amount sold to customers over the four decades since the side was originally made. Naturally, if one side was a hit, so the royalties rolled in in respect of the other, which could be (and frequently was) a nondescript piece that would never have meant anything on its own. The reverse of the original *Teddy Bears' Picnic* by Henry Hall, however, was another children's number called *Hush, Hush, Hush, Here Comes The Bogey Man!* and it would have been a hit in its own right no matter what was on the other side.

By some standards, indeed most "name" band standards of 1932, the Henry Hall band was small. One trumpet, where there had been three; one trombone instead of two; four saxes and a clarinet; two violins and four rhythms, totalling thirteen men where Jack Payne had used sixteen. Although Henry Hall was quoted as saying he would use a certain amount of music in the "hot" idiom in his programmes, this was not generally the case, but to be fair, Henry Hall himself composed two quite advanced non-vocal (and

thus quite uncommercial) numbers in that idiom in 1934. These were *East Wind* and *Wild Ride*. Later on, he popularized the voice of Phyllis Robbins, and the rumbling bass of Bob Mallin, singing *Wanderers* and other Wild West-type numbers that were very popular in the mid-thirties. His drummer, George Elrick, was also a "natural" for putting over comedy material such as *I Like Bananas Because They Have No Bones* and *The Music Goes 'Round And Around*, and later that year, on May 27, 1936, Henry Hall directed the band aboard the Cunarder *Queen Mary* on her maiden voyage to New York. During his absence the band in the studio was led by Bert Read, then the pianist and arranger.

It was during the spring of that year that the great American arranger and bandleader Benny Carter was invited to London to provide arrangements for the BBC Dance Orchestra. Here was one of the most versatile and truly gifted musicians of all time, for he not only provided scores that stood out by their taste and originality, but he could and did play trumpet, clarinet, alto and tenor saxophone, and piano, with equal ability and perfection. He made many records while in this country and on the Continent, using local musicians who seemed inspired by his presence. Benny Carter, then twenty-nine years old, was born in New York, and claims his first inspiration to learn

to play alto saxophone came when he heard Frankie Trumbauer's beautiful solo on a record made in 1923 by Don Bestor and the Benson Orchestra of Chicago. It was called *I Never Miss The Sunshine*, and it showed what a superb arranger Bestor was, and how far in advance of his time was Trumbauer.

It was Henry Hall who helped greatly to popularize *Underneath The Arch*, by Bud Flanagan and Chesney Allen, who sang it on the Hall record, and later returned to the studio with the band to make *Dreaming*, *Wanderer* and *Can't We Meet Again?* Henry Hall and the band were seen and heard in a cheerful bit of film nonsense called *Music Hath Charms*, and readers may perhaps remember the sequence in this when Henry Hall, due to begin his regular dance-band hour, found himself alone in the studio owing to some misunderstanding on the part of the members of the band. Playing the introductory signature tune twice to gain time, he made the usual announcement, and said the programme would start with "er - a piano solo." He then improvised one; the boys began to drift in after the first chorus, caught on to what was happening and began "busking" a melody until they were all present for a grand climax.

While Henry Hall was in America, his announcements were made for him by another announcer, who sounded very much like him. On his return, he began by saying, "This is Henry Hall speaking," and from then on it became *de rigueur* for him to make his preliminary remarks prefaced in this way.

On September 25, 1937, the BBC dispensed with its resident band, and Henry Hall took it on tour. These tours continued until after the war, when, like most leaders, Henry Hall decided that it was time to lay down his baton and concentrate on more rewarding work - hence his famous *Guest Nights*, where he introduced famous show-business personalities and entertainers, a pioneer in this field in England which others, some of them less personable by far, have paid him the compliment of imitating.

Neither Jack Payne nor Henry Hall had a monopoly of broadcasting among bandleaders, as many who remember the 'thirties will know. Every week-night, late, a famous band from a West End hotel or restaurant would have an hour to play the latest popular tunes, and the programmes were carefully scrutinized in advance by the BBC producers to ensure that no song was played too often and so lay the Corporation open to a charge of "plugging," i.e. favouring one or more numbers by playing them too frequently while ignoring others.

One of the regular broadcasting bands came from the Monseigneur Restaurant in Piccadilly. It was under the direction of an American bandleader named Roy Fox, and no better ambassador for his country could have been found. Certain American dance musicians who had been resident in London for several years had literally thrown their weight about, not to mention the crockery in the canteen

Benny Carter.

[Rex Harris



provided by one of the major recording companies. Sylvester Ahola had impressed his British colleagues with his civilized demeanour as well as his exceptionally brilliant trumpet playing; then in the autumn of 1930 came Roy Fox, also a trumpet player, though he was billed as "The Whispering Cornetist."

Born in Colorado, California, in 1901, Roy Fox worked with Art Hickman's Orchestra in Los Angeles, and made his first records (for Victor) there as principal cornetist and soloist in this band. He was not a "hot" player, but instead he perfected a style of playing with a mute that was different from any other cornet or trumpet sound at the time. He also worked for a while with Abe Lyman, then formed his own band for the Montmartre Café in Los Angeles. When sound films were introduced, Roy Fox became the musical director for the company that bears his name, coincidentally, and a year later, he accepted an invitation to appear for an eight weeks' season with his band at the Café de Paris in London. This was in September, 1930; the band made little impression on the public and less on the London musicians, though the unusual style of the leader's cornet intrigued them. Then in January, 1931, it was announced that Roy Fox had been appointed musical adviser to the then recently formed Decca Record Company. The understanding with the Ministry of Labour was that Roy

Fox would form a band of entirely British talent and so provide work for British musicians. This he proceeded to do; with such names as Al Bowlly on guitar and providing the vocals, Bill Harty on drums and a Londoner of twenty-two named Nat Gonella, whose avowed ambition was to play his trumpet like Louis Armstrong, here was a dance orchestra that provided serious competition for the established units. When it is remembered that the pianist and arranger was Lew Stone, whose brilliant ideas and superb good taste had lifted the Ambrose Orchestra at the May Fair Hotel into the topmost position of all, it is no wonder that Roy Fox's band fulfilled the high expectations of the connoisseurs and musicians alike.

Roy Fox's quiet, gentle demeanour made him a favourite with the patrons of the Monseigneur; he made a record of his signature tune, *Whispering*, which he introduced in the same way as he did his announcements on the air: "Hello, ladies and gentlemen. This is Roy Fox speaking. The boys and I now have the pleasure of playing *Whispering*." Spoken over out-of-tempo statement of the melody on celeste by Lew Stone, Roy Fox's announcement gives little clue of the three minutes of exciting music to follow. His own solo in impeccably smooth tones gives way immediately to a vigorous improvisation by Nat Gonella on mellophone (not trumpet!), in turn followed by a smooth clarinet solo which provides a background for an ocarina solo by the late Harry Berly. Berly was the tenor saxophonist in the band; he also played

Roy Fox and his Monseigneur Orchestra, London, 1931.





Nat Gonella and his Georgians recording in 1935.

(EMI

Foster's *Oh! Susannah*, which Lew Stone afterwards adopted as his signature tune, the band gradually takes up the tune of *Oh! Mo'nah* with the banjo prominently giving the right "Deep South revival meeting" flavour, then a sudden change of key introduces Nat Gonella's Armstrong-ish voice in a series of quatrains that occupy the rest of the side, assisted by a chorus from the band, which then fades out on *Oh! Susannah*. (When Louis Armstrong made his first appearance in England in July, 1932, Nat Gonella found his idol a life-long friend as well; almost to the day he died Louis made a point of asking about "my boy Nat," whose impersonations of the great negro trumpet soloist are often dazzlingly realistic. Lest it should be thought that Gonella is and was only a mere carbon copy of one of the greatest popular artists of the century, let it be said that his best work is entirely original; it is firmly based on Armstrong's style, but there could be no greater model for any musician, and for the rest of the 'thirties, through the war years and on up to the present day, Nat Gonella set a standard of British trumpet-playing that is unique and distinctive.)

viola and had been a member of a string quartet that had made some delightful records of chamber music for the National Gramophone Society in the 'twenties. The final chorus of this remarkable record is notable for the fine phrasing and attack of all the brasses, urged on by Bill Harty's exhilarating drumming. In the space of one side, the Fox band showed what its best performances were like; all that was missing was Al Bowlly's voice.

At the end of 1931, Roy Fox was taken ill, and spent the first three months of 1932 in a sanatorium in Switzerland. During this time, the orchestra at the Moussigneur was directed by Lew Stone, and it recorded a number which, it is said, helped to put Decca on its feet financially by the colossal sales. It was the Weems-Washburn spiritual number *Oh! Mo'nah* already referred to in the previous chapter, and it must rank as one of the best-selling dance records of all time, by any band. Fading in with a clarinet and rhythm playing the tune of Stephen

The days at the Monseigneur were numbered, however; during Roy Fox's enforced absence, it happened that the members of his band, perhaps without fully realizing it, looked more and more to Lew Stone as their leader. Then there was a disagreement between Roy Fox and the Monseigneur directors, who sought to control his activities on variety circuits with his band, and this was too much for Roy Fox. Accordingly, he announced his intention, on September 24, 1932, of leaving the Monseigneur. He could have insisted that the members of the band, who were all under personal contract to him (except Harry Berly and Lew Stone) should remain with him; but he did not, preferring instead to recruit a new band entirely, only Sid Buckman, his first trumpet man, remaining with him. The rest lined up behind Lew Stone at the Monseigneur and on October 24, Roy Fox and his Band opened at the Café Anglais.

Within six weeks, the new Roy Fox band had established a reputation comparable to that of the first, which was still attracting the dancers and applause of the critics in the Monseigneur. Said the *Melody Maker*: "A night spent there listening to the band is, indeed, both an intellectual treat and an entertainment in the best sense of the word." The report went on to make the point that Lew Stone was far too much of a musician to conduct meaninglessly, though he had felt that a focal point, even a figurehead, was "superfluous" in a band of this nature. He overcame this modesty, however, appointed Eddie Carroll as pianist, and adopted the rôle of conductor, with splendid results. The members of the band, for some reason, were all renamed among themselves; regardless of their first real names, they were all "Joe." Thus, handyman trombone player Joe Ferric was "Joe Fix," and, because of his habit of knocking over music-stands and tripping over microphone leads, leader Stone became known as "Joe Clumsy." Al Bowly, the British answer to Bing Crosby as a vocalist, and flutterer of young female hearts, was "Joe Sex." A newcomer to the Monseigneur as Lew Stone took over leadership was a real Joe - Crossman of that ilk, late of Ambrose's orchestra and one of the truly great alto and tenor saxophonists this country has ever produced. (He plays clarinet and baritone in comparable fashion.)

On December 2, 1932, Roy Fox and his Café Anglais band flew to Brussels to appear before their Majesties the King and Queen of Belgium, a great honour for Anglo-American dance musicians that the *Melody Maker* made the most of in a news item. "Another good job has been created," it said, "and the profession should be duly grateful."

A little over a month later, Roy Fox opened at the Kit-Cat Club, where the band stayed for just over a year. The famous vocal team "The Cubs" was formed during this time, and the band finally went to the Café de Paris for a season in March, 1934. It appeared in films such as *On The Air* and *Radio Parade*, and for

the next four years was on tour throughout the country. In the summer of 1938, Roy Fox's health again broke down, possibly owing to the strain of constant touring, and he disbanded the orchestra, going to Australia and eventually the United States where he remained until the war was over. His reappearance in London in 1946 was ill-timed, however; as has already been noted, the conditions that had made his Monseigneur, Café Anglais, Kit-Cat and Café de Paris bands possible, let alone great, had gone, and public taste had changed completely. Roy Fox went into music publishing and artists' agency business, and at this writing is still living in London.

Lew Stone did not remain at the Monseigneur longer than a year. Between November, 1933 and April, 1934 he and his superb band was the attraction at the Café Anglais; in the words of a popular song of that time, "Who walks in when I walk out?" as Lew Stone followed Roy Fox there, after a few months, returning to the Monseigneur until October, 1934. There followed a year and a half at the Hollywood Restaurant, during which time most of the records the band made were for Regal Zonophone, costing one shilling each. (Hitherto Lew Stone and Roy Fox had both featured on Decca records at two shillings, though this was reduced to 1s 6d in 1933.) As Lew Stone reverted to Decca at the end of 1935, Roy Fox signed with HMV. From March, 1936 to September, 1937, Lew Stone was to be seen and heard at the Café de Paris, and in that time he also directed the musical arrangements for the Hippodrome show *On Your Toes*, following this in October with *Hide And Seek* in the same theatre.

For the spring season of 1938, Lew Stone and his band appeared at Butlin's in Clacton, then Skegness, returning to the Café de Paris in June. The following March, Jack Hulbert's new musical *Under Your Hat* opened at the Palace Theatre, and Lew Stone was in charge of the pit orchestra. During the run of this, he also had a band at El Morocco Club, in the first winter of the war; his work during the war years was devoted to entertaining factory workers and troops alike. After it was over, Lew Stone conducted the orchestra for the Coliseum staging of Irving Berlin's *Annie, Get Your Gun*, and made many hundreds of broadcasts in *Music While You Work*. He was elected president of the Dance Band Directors' Association in April, 1947, and in 1952 had a band that included Joe Crossman and Monica Liter, from pre-war days, at the Pigalle in London. He celebrated twenty-one years as a bandleader with a reunion in Oddenino's in Regent Street on February 24, 1954, and on May 10 that year appeared on BBC-TV as pianist in a band that money could not buy: its personnel included all the big-name leaders (such as Roy Fox, Harry Roy, Billy Tennent, Joe Loss and Ambrose) actually playing their instruments! As nostalgia became obvious as a big business commodity, many of the old recordings of what had been regarded at the time and for some

years afterwards as ephemeral trivia were reissued on long-playing records, and Lew Stone's were prominent among them, partly for the vocals by Al Bowlly, but quite as much for the beautiful and not at all dated arrangements. (The Lew Stone band had always made a point of playing "hot" when possible; their leader regarded this as a useful flavouring to be used on such numbers as seemed to him to call for it, and the records of such numbers as *Tiger Rag*, *Milenberg Joys*, *Solitude*, *I Ain't Got Nobody* and *The Call Of The Freaks* compare very favourably indeed with American performances on record of the same titles.)

A television executive, Kenneth Trodd, for long a fan of Lew Stone's brand of dance music, decided that as his hero approached seventy, a biography should be written. With the co-operation of the central character, this was getting under way when on February 19, 1969, Lew Stone died suddenly. In March, 1971 his widow published a complete account of her husband's life in music, using his magnificent archives of photographs, posters, press cuttings and other memorabilia that tell the story much more eloquently and accurately than anything or anyone else ever could.

Returning to the early 'thirties, and the subject of late-night broadcasts, one of the most popular and most regular personalities among bandleaders to appear on these was Harry Roy. Born Harry Lipman in London on January 12, 1906, he changed his name by deed-poll as a young man, about the time he learned to play clarinet and alto saxophone. His first inspiration was Larry Shields of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, but as his popularity grew – as did the size of his band – Harry Roy's effervescent personality began to owe more to those of Ted Lewis and the negro leader Cab Calloway. (Calloway was the director of a band originally known as The Mis-sourians; he took over its leadership in 1930 and by means of outlandishly flamboyant gyrations and contortions, physical and vocal, in front of it, became an internationally famous star in his own right. His was the last American band to appear in England before the breakdown of arrangements between the Musicians' Union and the American Federation of Musicians made further imports of American talent impossible for nearly twenty years. He was known as the "Hi-De-Ho" originator.)

Harry Roy and his brother Sydney were both in the dance-band business from the time the latter was demobilized after the first world war. They had various bands: The Darnswells, the Continental Five, and the Crichton Lyrials, the latter quite a "hot" little group of six men, without a brass section, which appeared at the Café Anglais as far back as May, 1926. Early in 1930, after a Continental tour, the Lyrials broke up, and Harry Roy formed his own band for the Bat Club, one of those small night-clubs that abounded in London's West End during the inter-war years. A few months later, he took this

quartet as the nucleus of a larger band to play in the Leicester Square Theatre; it was an RKO cinema, and the band became Harry Roy and his RKOLians.

This band was quite a sensation. It had two pianists and a drummer who, a few years later and while they were still members of Harry Roy's Band, became famous in their own right. The pianists were Ivor Moreton and Dave Kaye, who having established themselves as "Harry Roy's Tiger-Ragamuffins" (after a very successful performance, on stage and on record, of *Tiger Rag*) left to tour on their own until the RAF claimed them during the war, and the drummer was Joe Daniels, whose records with his Hot Shots on Parlophone were enormously successful, and which were issued in America equally successfully. It was complained among the jazz enthusiasts of the mid-thirties that Joe Daniels' records were too flamboyant to be in accordance with the best taste in jazz, but hindsight shows that he and Nat Gonella between them kept alive the spirit of improvisation and the whole concept of small-band jazz when almost all other bands, in England at least, were disdaining the idiom, and still Daniels and Gonella were hugely successful with the public.

After the Odeon job ended, Harry Roy and his band could be seen and heard in the London Pavilion, during the latter half of 1932 and the early weeks of 1933; then came the first of a series of breaks that propelled the dynamic leader and his band to the top of an extremely crowded and competitive profession: he signed a contract with the management of the Café Anglais, for three months before going on a variety tour that took them through the summer. Then early in 1934, came the greatest chance of all. Ambrose had left the May Fair Hotel a few months earlier, and Harry Roy was selected to appear with his band in the most celebrated of all London hotels at that time. He remained there until July, 1936, after which Ambrose returned for a time.

When the May Fair contract expired, Harry Roy resumed the life of touring the variety halls, bringing down every house in which he appeared with the band. Joe Daniels left early in 1937, and his place was taken by a coloured West Indian named Ray Ellington, whose crazy sense of humour matched Harry Roy's own, and who can be heard on many of the band's records. During the May Fair period, Harry Roy married Elizabeth Brooke, daughter of "the White Rajah of Sarawak," and the event caused a sensation in Society circles. Fancy a member of that set marrying a Jewish bandleader! (The old barriers were crumbling fast, however, as was shown a year later when the newly-ascended bachelor King Edward VIII announced his intention of marrying Mrs Wallace Simpson, an American divorcee, and did so – at the cost of his throne.) Mrs Harry Roy was some-

Cab Calloway.

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Harry Roy and his Band, Stanley Black at the piano.

thing of a singer; she contributed the vocal parts to several sides the band made in the middle 'thirties, receiving label credit for doing so at a time when most singers were cloaked in the splendid anonymity of the phrase "With Vocal Refrain" or "With Vocal Chorus."

When war came, Harry Roy set out to entertain all those actively helping to win it, and made tour upon tour of service camps at home and abroad, refusing tempting "civilian" offers in order to do so. When it was over, he resumed the variety tours, but like his colleagues, found things were not what they had been. He disbanded his orchestra and opened a club. This was burned to the ground. After years in the doldrums, he secured a position as leader of a sextet that made the West End and the big-time once

more, in the pit of the show *Oh! Clarence!* It was in Harry Roy's beloved Dixieland idiom. He had come full circle. Following this he opened the new Dixie Palace in Brighton and had a six-month season there in 1969, but suffered a heart attack that reduced him to inactivity once more. On February 1, 1971, he died.

In the spring of 1930, there came to London at the same time as Ted Lewis's second visit a smart American unit under the direction of saxophonist Hal Kemp. He had led his group of teenage college students on a short visit there as long ago as the summer of 1924; they were known as the Carolina Club Orchestra and were considered pretty "hot" by the pioneer connoisseurs of this type of music. In the intervening six years, the band had altered relatively little, expanding somewhat but with the basic personnel remarkably similar. It featured less "hot" dance music, having become a polished stage and cabaret act that delighted

the *Melody Maker* reporter who said that the eleven-piece combination "gave a refined, finished act which greatly pleased the bulk of London dance musicians. The band has not only a good dance style, but it appears thoroughly at home on the boards, and the Jack Hulbert-like personality of Hal Kemp is in keeping with the collegiate style of general presentation."

This writer continued to praise the playing, the singing and the comedy, which he found "more broad than subtle," and singled out as outstanding the trumpet player Mickey Bloom, brother of Rube Bloom, an American pianist and composer of several dance numbers and concert pieces in the then modern idiom. Mickey Bloom was also a comic dancer, and it may have been this that focussed attention on him; his partner in the trumpet section went unnoticed by the *Melody Maker* scribe. This was a young man of Irish extraction named Bernart Berigan, but known to his friends and eventually to the world as "Bunny" Berigan. The bass player Pat "Spike" Hughes, also an Irishman, tried to get him to play on a free-lance recording date he had with Decca, but Berigan never showed up; "Spike" used Ted Lewis's "hot" man "Muggsy" Spanier instead, but Decca were restrained from issuing the records by the Ministry of Labour who had just introduced its infamous ruling about American - some American - visitors recording in England.

Berigan had no need to worry about a record session more or less, regardless of where it might be held, however; his abilities were such that he was in great demand for just this purpose by such American bandleaders as Fred Rich, Ben Selvin and the Dorsey Brothers, and after he returned to New York with Hal Kemp's orchestra, which had appeared at the Coliseum and the Café de Paris in London, Berigan found there was no shortage of work for a player of his capabilities, prevailing economic conditions notwithstanding. He went from band to band, even working for a time with Benny Goodman before branching out, as they all seemed to do, as leader of his own group.

Some musicians are born leaders; those we have met so far have in the main answered to that description. Bunny Berigan was not, however. He was inclined to be as irresponsible as he had been towards "Spike" Hughes in London, and after three years, his band folded and he accepted a position with Tommy Dorsey. A few months later he tried again; but the kind of life he had been leading, apparently plentifully provided with alcohol, took its toll. As with Bix Beiderbecke eleven years before, an attack of pneumonia left him without any reserve of strength, and on June 2, 1942, he died. He was thirty-four.

On returning to the States, Hal Kemp toured with his band, broadcasting and playing for a while in the Manhattan Room of the Pennsylvania Hotel in New York. He recorded a great deal and was at the height of popularity when he was involved in a fatal car

accident a few days after Christmas, 1940. He was thirty-five. The best-known member of his band was his pianist at the time of the London appearances, John Scott Trotter, later director of the orchestra in Decca's Los Angeles studios, accompanying Bing Crosby and other artists.

Although the authorities in England prevented casual recording sessions by visiting Americans, there was fortunately no ban at that time on their playing in theatres; thus, on July 18, 1932, Louis Armstrong appeared at the London Palladium. The greatest jazz soloist of all, preceded by many records, actually appeared in our midst. Nat Gonella was speechless with delight; "straight" orchestra leaders Reginald King and Percy Bush found his act "against all definitions of good taste . . . an insult to any musician . . . a disgusting exhibition, likely to nauseate all decent men," and most of the other leading dance musicians in London said they felt that Louis was everything he had been cracked up to be and that his records assured us he was, but that his act was not suitable for the general public, more for the intimate atmosphere of a night-club. Some even felt that the Palladium served to cheapen Armstrong, rather than the reverse; Ray Noble wished he could get him into the recording studio "and tell him exactly what I wanted him to do!" (So, doubtless, do Louis' hosts of admirers!) Perhaps the most balanced comment on the young negro genius came from Joe Crossman, who commented calmly but with level warmth that Louis was "a marvellous trumpeter of course, and the originator of half the good things in dance music," but he preferred listening to Armstrong on record rather than in the flesh, for he had to admit that he found his mannerisms barbaric. "I thrilled at his first stage numbers," wrote Britain's most versatile and best-known saxophonist, "but found nothing in his performance of the famous *Tiger Rag*, which struck me as being badly constructed and put over simply as an effort to impress the uninitiated."

Doubtless there was a good deal of truth in Joe Crossman's impression. Louis Armstrong was a supreme showman, but as several musicians who applauded him were quick to point out, his was not a show suitable for those who were not *en rapport* with his art. His wide grin - it was in England that he was first dubbed "Satchmo," his own corruption of the term "Satchelmouth," which is self-explanatory - and by-play with a huge white pocket handkerchief, his apparent strain on his neck muscles ("he resembles a gorged python," wrote Haanen Swaffer in one of the national daily papers) as he reached for his famous top F's that he shot out unflinchingly one after another, and his gravelly voice; all these things were no doubt shocking and even repulsive to the hyper-sensitive members of an audience that had hitherto been subjected only to the college humour of a Hal Kemp, the wise-cracking of an Abe Lyman, or the deliberate "ham" acting of a Ted Lewis. The hastily-recruited





Left: Joe Daniels.

Above: Harry Roy recording in 1941.

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negro band that accompanied Louis' act was hardly noticed; it was imported from Paris, with two exceptions, and was barely adequate. Subsequently, Billy Mason's band, led by this young British pianist from Fred Elizalde's band of a few years earlier, replaced the coloured one, and this seemed to please everyone who heard it, Louis Armstrong included.

Despite the opinion prevalent among British musicians that Louis Armstrong was a musician's musician first, he packed nearly a thousand people into the Nottingham Palais de Danse on the hottest night of a particularly hot summer. The manager, SJ Fallon, is quoted as saying that nobody but Armstrong would have made so many people go to a dance in such a tropical atmosphere!

Such was Louis Armstrong's personality that he could appear before their late Majesties King George V and Queen Mary, and bowing to the Royal box,

announce his next number with "This one's for you, Rex!" – and get away with it. (The Royal reaction to a performance that was "likely to nauseate all decent men" is not known.) He appeared in France in the autumn of 1934 with a negro orchestra that again acted as little more than a backdrop for his own virtuosity, and on returning to the States was soon caught up again in the toils of the "Swing" era. His band was one of the finest of its kind, and though many of its records are of commercial material that in other hands remained no more than that, when Louis – or one of his outstanding colleagues – played a solo chorus, it became emblazoned with the hallmark of a quality product. Armstrong was originally an Okeh recording artist whose work was issued in England on Parlophone; he recorded briefly for Victor (HMV) in 1932 and 1933, but thereafter made no American recordings until the autumn of 1935, when he signed a contract with the new and vigorous Decca label. His records thenceforth until 1942 sold at 35 cents each, less than half the price of his earlier issues. To be sure, he was curiously mis-cast on some of them;

he was teamed with Andy Iona and his Hawaiians and made to record such things as *To You, Sweetheart, Aloha* and *On A Coconut Island*, but to balance this, he made some interesting sides with the Mills Brothers ("Four Boys and a Guitar") and some purely vocal arrangements of some pseudo-spirituals such as *Shadrack* and *Jonah And The Whale*.

He appeared in England again as a performer in 1956, on the revolving stage of Empress Hall, London, with his All-Stars and a couple of extras in the form of the late Ella Logan, a Scottish lass who had entranced her public as a teenager in 1930, but whose return after many years in the States was regarded as something very like an affront to Louis Armstrong, and a wooden-legged dancer named Bates whose very agility in the circumstances was grotesque.

Tirelessly, Louis continued to tour the world, charming audiences in Japan as he charmed them in Ghana, in Australia, in Germany . . . reports began to come in that he was in failing health, but somehow he always came up again with a wide smile and a

Right: *Louis Armstrong at London Airport (1956).*

[Valerie Wilton

Below: *Bonny Berigan.*

[Rex Harris

Opposite page: *Coleman Hawkins.*

[Ava Studio







flourish of his white handkerchief as he played yet another chorus of his signature tune, *When It's Sleepy-Time Down South*. Then the trumpet-playing became less, the froggy-voiced vocals more obviously hard work. Two days after his 71st birthday, on July 6, 1971, Louis Armstrong died in New York. Among the pall-bearers at his funeral were Bing Crosby and David Frost. Louis had made his last television appearance on the Dave Frost show – with Bing Crosby. Also present were singer Peggy Lee, and the man whose music Louis admired so honestly: Guy Lombardo.

In 1933 we were honoured by Duke Ellington's Orchestra, and the following year by Cab Calloway's, as has been already noted. Then the American Federation of Musicians clamped down entirely on British musicians visiting the States to play, and the British Musicians' Union replied in kind. Only if they came as solo artists appearing in vaudeville could American dance musicians play in Britain. Thus came Coleman Hawkins, late of Fletcher Henderson's band, in 1934, returning to America only when war threatened in 1939, to show us what the finest dance-band tenor saxophonist in the world sounded like in person, and Benny Carter (see the section on Henry Hall) two years later. In America itself, "hot" playing was considered by the general public as finished. It demanded, and of course received, almost unrelieved sweet corn instead of hot peppers. Jan Garber rivalled Guy Lombardo in dishing out the treatise, and was billed as "The Idol of the Air-Lanes." Red Nichols formed a large band that occasionally featured solos by the leader on trumpet; Benny Goodman carved himself a comfortable niche in the broadcasting studios – and sometimes made records for which as a commodity there was little enough demand, regardless of who was on them. Paul Whiteman pruned his concert aggregation of thirty-four men down to twenty by 1933, and Ted Lewis, still the High-Hatted Tragedian of Jazz, led a band that offered a strange compromise,

between the out-and-out Dixieland style that had been his trade-mark since he started as a leader in 1919, and the demand for music to forget the Depression by. Even when playing numbers such as *We're In The Money*, though, he allowed his "hot" trumpet soloist "Muggsy" Spanier a solo to do as he liked with, and began featuring a girl vocalist, as several other bands, Whiteman's included, had been doing successfully for some time. Whiteman used Mildred Bailey, the sister of Al Rinker, one of his original Rhythm Boys, then made a feature of Ramona Davies, who played piano, looked glamorous and put over smart sophisticated songs such as *Eadie Was A Lady* and *Annie Doesn't Live Here Any More*, sometimes with the band, sometimes with only her piano or perhaps two or three Whiteman musicians in attendance.

The sentimental singer began to gather more and more of the limelight. In San Francisco, the resident band in the Mark Hopkins Hotel, directed by Anson Weeks, featured a twenty-year-old lad named Bob Crosby, younger by ten years than his famous brother Bing, endowed with a voice bearing a remarkable family likeness. In 1935, Bob Crosby assumed leadership in New York of a band hitherto led by Clark Randall, and for the next decade it produced recorded performances of jazz standards and sentimental numbers with equal ease and superiority of performance. The warmth of the band sound was comparable to that of the old Jean Goldkette orchestra, and at no time was there any concession to the customers who wanted treatise exclusively.

Even Duke Ellington's superb orchestra had to play sweet music, but as might be imagined, it did so in a way that was quite different from all the others. The band had journeyed to Hollywood in the summer of 1930 to appear in the film *Check And Double Check* (to which it contributed unforgettable performances of *Three Little Words* with vocal work by Paul Whiteman's ex-Rhythm Boys, and *Ring Dem Bells*, a joyous number that was calculated to raise the national morale by

Left: Jan Garber and his Orchestra (1925).

Right: Bob Crosby and his Orchestra; "they turned Dixieland into swing".

its sheer exuberance). After the London visit in June, 1933, already referred to, Ellington again took his band to Hollywood, where they appeared in a film called *Murder At The Vanities* that contained a number that, although it caught the mood of the time and was intended as a comment on that time, it has remained a standard. This was *Cocktails For Two*, which in its verse celebrated the end of Prohibition (the repeal went in effect as from December 6, 1933 and the great experiment, one of the most crashing failures of the century, was declared at an end. "Oh what delight to be given the right to be carefree and gay once again," ran the opening lines. One would never have guessed that hard times were still very much in evidence, but who cared? Only the speakeasy bosses and the illicit beer-barons whose vile empires crumbled away at the stroke of a governmental pen). Ellington did not compose *Cocktails For Two*, but he and his band made a non-vocal and very artistic record of it, smooth but warm, thereby satisfying the Ellington fans and ordinary dancers alike.

In the earliest 'thirties, King Fox Trot and Queen Waltz held sway, literally, in the ballrooms and dance halls throughout the English-speaking world. There were occasional novelty numbers that were tremendously successful, although not written in either of these measures: such as *Valencia*, a six-eight one-step by the Spanish composer José Padilla, in 1926, which he followed immediately with *Ça, c'est Paris*, a song always associated with the French comedienne and dancer *par excellence*, Mistinguett. (Padilla had had considerable success in 1920 with another typically Spanish number called *El Relicario*, and in 1924 with *La Violeta*, but *Valencia*, with its extraordinary contrast of a sentimental lyric – in English, at least – set to a rousing march tune, made a fortune for its composer.) Then in 1930, America discovered Cuban music.

Interest in Latin-American dance forms had existed in the USA and in England since the immediate pre-World War I era when the Tango was introduced (and delighted many while it outraged those who, true to form, saw in its sensuous languor ample evidence of the decline of modern youth. Perhaps the events in Europe between 1914 and 1918 induced some changes of mind on the subject). But the foxtrot required less expertise on the dance floor; it was said that if you could walk in time to music, you could foxtrot, and as the two-four beat could be adapted to any tempo from 20 to 60 bars a minute, it becomes obvious at once why this dance lasted so well throughout the entire decade and a half, virtually unchallenged for popularity. (Dance records of *Valencia* and other Spanish or Spanish-flavoured numbers, such as the paso-doble, a one-step in three-four time, were



invariably labelled "Fox Trot," much to the justifiable annoyance of the critics.)

One of New York's most famous publishers was EB Marks. His son Herbert took a bride on honeymoon to Havana. Their hotel was managed by the brother of a local composer named Moises Simons. As a result the happy pair were introduced to local compositions, including Simons' most popular tune, *El Manisero*. Herbert Marks liked this so much that he took it home with him to his father, who eventually accepted an English lyric by a vaudeville artist named Marion Sunshine, who called the number by a literal translation of the original – *The Peanut Vendor* – and built the lyric from that point.

Much has been written about the African origins of jazz, and through jazz, of dance music of the era with which we are concerned in this book; but *The Peanut Vendor*, and its long line of successors which continued to this day, is much more closely affiliated to African rhythms than any jazz (or dance music derived from it). The band that made *The Peanut Vendor* its own was Don Azpiazu's from the Havana Casino; it featured the tune at Keith's Palace Theatre and recorded it for Victor. (The record label erroneously describes it as "Rumba Fox Trot," whereas it is strictly speaking a Son, though the term "rumba" stuck and to many people signifies any Latin-American rhythm, be it in fact a rumba, son, beguine, conga, samba or guajira.) Azpiazu was the brother of Miss Sunshine's stage partner, so the background to the number was very much a family affair; he came to London in 1932 with his band and was quite well received, but although the conservative British took to *The Peanut Vendor*, it was some years before other Latin-American numbers, or those with the correct flavour, had anything like the same success. Sid Phillips, one of Britain's most brilliant arrangers and protagonist of the Dixieland style throughout his professional career of over forty years, produced a fine arrangement of the number for Ambrose; as there



Left: *Lecuona Cuban Boys* (Paris, 1936).

[Rex Harris

Bottom left: *Geraldo and the Gaucho Tango Orchestra*. [EMI

were no real Cuban instruments, such as maraccas, gourds and bongoes in London at the time, when the Ambrose Orchestra came to record it, improvised gadgets making the same sound were used.

One of the principal British leaders to espouse the cause of Latin-American music in the early 'thirties was Gerald Bright, brother of Sid Bright, pianist of the Piccadilly Players under Al Starita. Calling himself professionally simply Geraldo, he studied Latin music on the Continent, and in August, 1930, appeared in the Savoy Hotel with his Gaucho Tango Orchestra, suitably dressed in local costume. This was a great success, and three years later Geraldo and his colourful unit appeared at a Royal Command performance, at the same time widening the scope of their repertoire to include more conventional "sweet" dance music for the patrons of the Savoy. This called for a change of signature tune from *Lady Of Spain* to *I Bring To You Sweet Music*. Geraldo's policy has never wavered; he is one of the few British dance band leaders who have seldom attempted anything in the nature of "hot" music. Even so, the character of his work never was as cloying as that of some of his American opposite numbers; his colleague Maurice Winnick at the Piccadilly Hotel determined that his band should play *The Sweetest Music This Side Of Heaven*, which was as accurate a description of his offerings as it was apt as a signature tune. Several of Maurice Winnick's records are virtually indistinguishable from those of Guy Lombardo and Jan Garber, complete with saxophone teams affecting a thick and pronounced vibrato.

Britain was also visited in the middle 'thirties by the Lecuona Cuban Boys, a band of genuine Cuban musicians and singers. Their original pianist, Ernesto Lecuona, had composed an excitingly sensuous number called *Siboney* which was quite successful in both England and America in 1931, and the band featured this and other Latin numbers such as *Amapolá* and *Maria La O*, the former a tango tune that was very successfully revived during the second world war, the latter a rumba that became more popular as a tango under the name *Maria My Own*.

There was one British band at this time, though, that was the perfect answer to both exotic importations and the home-grown copies as well as the sugar merchants, and it was led by Billy Cotton, the redoubtable Londoner whom we met in Chapter 3 briefly. In 1930, he had in his brass section no less an artist than Nat Gonella, and when the latter left in



Top right: *Geraldo himself*.

Right: *Billy Cotton*.



Left: Maurice Winnick.

Right: Jack Jackson.

[MM

1931 to join Roy Fox at the Monseigneur, his place was taken eventually by his younger brother, Brut. By the end of 1933, Billy Cotton had another Louis Armstrong admirer in his trumpet section in the person of Teddy Foster, now a well-known manager for all kinds of popular entertainment acts. Billy Cotton never seemed to forgive Roy Fox for employing Nat Gonella; he objected strongly to Fox's being allowed to form a new band here after the war. During the 'thirties, however, the Cotton band played vigorous dance music and smoother sentimental ballads with taste and charm; not for the extrovert Cockney the saccharine saxophones and wailing violins. Instead, a punchy brass section that throughout our period of interest included the American negro Ellis Jackson (see Chapter 2), a sturdy rhythm section that knew how to deal with jazz standards, comedy and romantic numbers alike, and the voice of Alan Breeze made an irresistible combination. Alone among British bands the Cotton unit tackled Duke Ellington numbers such as *Black And Tan Fantasy* and *Best Wishes*, in the spirit of Ellington without attempting a carbon copy (as did, for example, Stanley Barnett's orchestra that played in Madame Tussaud's Cinema). It put new life into well-worn standards such as *Margie*, *Avonlea* and *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, and the Billy Cotton record of *Old Fashioned Love* is a model of restraint linked with tonal "heat,"

and charm allied to rhythmic relaxation. There were three different *Tiger Rags* and a *Bagle Call Rag* that almost stole Harry Roy's thunder (and his signature tune); Billy Cotton's own signature tune was – unaccountably – *Somebody Stole My Gal*, with which he continued to introduce his variety programme *Wakey Wakey!* up to the time of his death on March 23, 1969). There were low-comedy turns such as *Nobody Loves A Fairy When She's Forty* and *With Her Head Tucked Underneath Her Arm* – which contained two more choruses than even its creator Stanley Holloway could get on his record of it – and warmly romantic, tuneful readings of numbers such as *Serenade In The Night* and an extraordinary pseudo-Hawaiian number called *Oh! Maki-Maki Oh!*

The Billy Cotton band was first and foremost a variety turn; it rarely appeared in a dance hall during the 'thirties and 'forties, and never held a West End hotel position. The personality of its leader did not match the caviare-and-champagne atmosphere of these establishments in any case, and he reached a much wider audience by his theatre appearances than would have been possible had he settled for the rounds of Mayfair. His band was not the only one that specialized in comedy numbers, though; perhaps strangely, another of these was led by the trumpet player Jack Jackson, who had worked with Fred Elizalde in 1927 and Jack Hylton from 1927 to 1929, then with Percival Mackey and Jack Payne before forming his own band. This opened at the Dorchester Hotel on August 1, 1933, and for five years it was a very popular organization, making records that sold well and broadcasts that attracted a high listening figure. Like Billy Cotton's, Jack Jackson's band was very versatile; it tackled rubbish such as *Mrs Rush And Her Scrubbing Brush* with as much aplomb as sophisticated ballads as *Stars Fell On Alabama*. The vocalist on this and several others recorded during October, 1934 was the American blues singer, Alberta Hunter, who gave the raw material of the folk-song of her people an artistic veneer that helped popularize it with the world at large. She too coped like the true artist she is with other and much varied material. Her appearance at the Dorchester in cabaret was very well received. Another popular feature of Jack Jackson's records was the vocal work of two young men who, though not mentioned on the labels, have since merited that distinction a thousandfold: Denny Dennis and Sam Costa.

Jack Jackson gave up his band after the war, and in 1948 began his long series of radio shows called *Record Round-Up*, into which he inserted snatches of existing records to make the craziest pattern of lunatic humour, from playing an LP at 78 rpm to simulate a





nagging wife to using the remarkable "click" language of the Xosa tribe of Central Africa. (He even played some notable records and made them and their artists nationally popular. He lives at this writing in semi-retirement in Tenerife, in the Canary Islands.)

The year 1935 was in many ways brilliant and wonderful, in others sombre and foreboding. It was the year when their late Majesties King George V and Queen Mary celebrated their Silver Jubilee, and the year when Adolf Hitler, self-appointed Chancellor of the Third Reich in Germany after the death of Ludendorff the previous August, reinstated compulsory military service in Germany in flagrant defiance of the terms of the hated Versailles Treaty. It was a summer of sunshine and an improving economic position throughout the world, and an autumn during which Benito Mussolini, senior partner of the soon-to-be-established Berlin-Rome Axis, sent his Blackshirt troops into Abyssinia to slaughter innocent natives, on the flimsiest of pretexts, in fact to expand Italy's African empire, test the reaction of the free nations and at the same time wipe out the memory of Italy's defeat in the same part of the world in 1896. The democracies were shaken, and in accordance with the provisions of the charter of the League of Nations, applied sanctions against Italy in a pitiful attempt to match guns with paper. America remained isolationist. The Atlantic Ocean was still three thousand miles of sea between the Old World and the New. Ten years before, the Great Powers had signed the Treaty of Locarno. Ten years in the future, the war that from that moment became more and more inevitable ended in the blinding flash of the first atomic bomb soon after Mussolini's corpse dangled by the heels from a lamp-post alongside his mistress's body, and Hitler and his bride of one day committed suicide in the ruins of his Berlin Chancellery as the avenging Russian armies closed in for the *coup-de-grace*.

Of all the songs that can be said to catch the mood of their age, none did so with greater prescience, surely, than a number Irving Berlin wrote in 1935 for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers to sing in the third of their remarkable series of song-and-dance extravaganzas that helped steady the morale of ordinary folk in what Ray Noble termed "those dangerous years." That film was *Follow The Fleet*, and the song was *Let's Face The Music And Dance*. "There may be trouble ahead," wrote Irving Berlin, "soon we may be without the moon, humming a different tune and then..."

But in the Astaire-Rogers films there was no other hint of foreboding; they would never have got on to the studio floor, much less the cinemas of the civilized world, if they had been heavy with warning of approaching doom. Even HG Wells' film *Things To Come* depicting anti-aircraft barrages firing in the

streets of the mythical Everytown in 1940, horribly accurate as it turned out, was regarded generally as just another spine-chiller. A nation basking in the glow of imperial solidarity engendered by the Silver Jubilee celebrations could not (or would not) take seriously the idea that what Wells forecast could happen here. Still less could the American people on the whole conceive that the mad little ex-corporal of the first global carnage, this odd little figure that looked (from that distance at least) like Charlie Chaplin, could plunge the world, themselves ultimately included, into another bloodbath within four years.

So as 1935 and its celebrations drew to a close, there was comparatively little general apprehension. The League of Nations, of which Russia was a new member (and America never was) was doing its best over Abyssinia, and in any case, hadn't Mussolini made the Italian railways run on time? It might even turn out to be a good thing if European culture was firmly planted in Africa at that point, even forcibly; after all, the American West was won by suppressing uncivilized Red Indians, and so on and so on the smug arguments ran. America was too busy in any case putting her economic affairs in order after the disastrous years that had immediately preceded 1935.

The new optimism was reflected to some extent in the upsurge of popularity of records and livelier dance music to play on them. In the summer of 1934, Benny Goodman was playing at Billy Rose's Music Hall, a new night-club, with a band of his own. It was doing very well, then suddenly in the middle of October, it closed. Benny Goodman was out of a job. He was planning to bring a band of quintessential excellence to England - and the ban already referred to put a stop to that. Nothing daunted, he put another band together, rehearsed it and drilled it to a pitch of perfection that rivalled the Casa Loma Orchestra, with the difference that the arrangements were less stiff, there were more places for improvised solos, and most of the members of the band were established "hot" players. It broadcast on NBC's network in a spot called *Let's Dance*, and eventually landed a Victor recording contract. Starting on April 4, 1935, Benny Goodman and his Orchestra, relatively unknown to the world at large, committed to wax and posterity a remarkable series of commercial records that were issued all over the world at that time or soon after, and many have since appeared on LP.

The last *Let's Dance* broadcast immediately preceded the band's first hotel engagement. By an extraordinary piece of mis-casting, as it were, the establishment chosen for them was the Roosevelt in New York, where the regular band over many winter seasons was Guy Lombardo's Royal Canadians. The guests at the hotel had become accustomed to the musical molasses served up by the Canadians, and when confronted by the exuberant expertise of Benny Goodman and his thirteen musicians, they complained bitterly! This



was noisy jazz, they said. The management reached the same conclusion: Goodman was fired the night the band opened, and three weeks later, they were out of work again.

Not perturbed, at any rate outwardly, Benny

Goodman took on Bunny Berigan in place of one of his other trumpet men, and after a week in Pittsburgh, the band headed west on an extended road trip through Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Colorado and finally, California. On August 21, 1935, the band

opened with moderate success at the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles. Before the night was over, the crowd were ecstatically yelling for more. They had liked the popular numbers offered to begin the programme, but it was Benny Goodman and his Orchestra playing Fletcher Henderson's arrangements which in former times would have been termed "hot" that excited them. "Hot" dance music was back, riding the wave-crest of gradually returning prosperity – only they didn't call it that any more.

Instead, somehow, somewhere along the way this highly technical but exciting precision-tool streamlined music that roused the teenagers and others as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band had fifteen to twenty years earlier, and as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and the rest were to do thirty years later, became known as Swing Music. In 1932, Duke Ellington had recorded a light-hearted number that came as near to being a comedy performance as that distinguished leader ever reached, and it was called *It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing*. Eight years before, an obscure band in New Orleans, led by trumpeter Johnny de Droit, recorded something simply known as *The Swing* (it was based on the old college song *Waxington And Lee Swing*), and in 1914 there had been something else called *San Antonio Swing*; but with the exception of Ellington's, these did not inspire dancing as Benny Goodman and his superb band of craftsmen did. With fellow-Chicagoan Gene Krupa on drums, and a company of some of the finest musicians in the country, Benny Goodman symbolized for America the return of better times – for a while at least.

His Victor records appeared in England on HMV, the commercials sometimes on the new eighteen-penny dance music series, the more elaborate and "swinging" performances on the half-crown series that also offered everything from rumbustious ballads by such as Peter Dawson, which even then sounded dated, to teashop music by mostly German orchestras. To set them apart from this antiquarian fare, HMV devised its Swing Music Series, and so it remained for twenty years, long after the term had passed, as such things must, into the history books.

The new Goodman records were extremely popular in England from the first, a Henderson arrangement of *King Porter Stomp*, an old ragtime number composed as long ago as 1906 by a Creole pianist by the name of Ferdinand Morton, better known as "Jelly-Roll" Morton. He was a fine musician and composer, but self-opinionated to a degree, and claimed to have invented jazz (and hence swing music) in 1902! A few months before the HMV Swing Music Series was inaugurated, the cheaper label had put out quietly a Goodman record of a song by the famous composer

and light comedian Johnny Mercer, called *The Dixieland Band*. Set to a tune that owed a great deal to one of that band's most popular numbers, *Jazz Me Blues* (going back to 1921), the lyric described the band and ended by saying they were all dead, playing in Heaven with Gabriel on trumpet. In fact, Nick LaRocca was still as much alive as the rest of his 1921 band, and in 1936, after hearing a good deal of "Swing" music on the radio, he resolved to make a come-back. He did so, and for a year and a half was very successful proving that "Swing" was only another name for Jazz, which had grown up from a quintet such as his Dixieland Band to a fourteen-piece band like Benny Goodman's.

In England, the prevailing mood was similar. The feeling was that Swing was in the air (and the professional youth-haters had a glorious time making wheezy jokes about how, in their opinion, the practitioners of "Swing" ought to do just that, from a gallows). The British band that had the technical resources and the artistic ability to lead the way in the new-old style was Ambrose's. Always regarded as the finest band this country ever produced, the Ambrose band in the late 'twenties and throughout the 'thirties was a model of good taste and musicianship. It had alternated between the May Fair Hotel and the Embassy Club throughout the decade, but its records and broadcasts brought its incomparable music to a world-wide audience. Bert Ambrose, who died on June 12, 1971, is on record as saying that his happiest and proudest moments were during the years between 1928 and 1939. Well they might be; his employees' names read like the proverbial Who's Who in Dance Music, and as a leader he can be seriously regarded as Britain's answer to Benny Goodman. (He had in Danny Polo an American clarinetist of a talent that matched Goodman's own, and in Sid Phillips an arranger, composer, all-round reed player and pianist whose work is as fresh and imaginative as in the mid-thirties when it was recorded.)

This chapter began on the cheerful note of *The Clouds Will Soon Roll By*; only Irving Berlin seems to have realized that clouds of a more sinister kind were beginning to roll up. As people watched Fred Astaire dancing with Ginger Rogers in *Top Hat* to the title song and *Cheek To Cheek*, among other tuncfully romantic numbers, with King George V firmly seated on the throne of England, Stanley Baldwin heading a Conservative majority at the first election since 1931, and Hitler at least had been quite reasonable in allowing the disputed Saar territory to decide its own future (or so it seemed), the prospects for 1936 looked reasonably rosy. If those same people could have known what was really in store, they might have been less inclined to face the music and dance; it looks from this point, three and a half decades later, like fiddling while Rome was burning. Only it wasn't Rome that was burning; it was Addis Ababa, the capital of Abyssinia.

5 Let's face the music and dance

The year 1936 was exactly three weeks old when King George V died suddenly. In the space of that one calendar year, the British Empire had three kings: King Edward VIII abdicated exactly three weeks before the close of the year, and his brother George took his place. Italy overran and occupied Abyssinia, and a Spanish army officer named Franco let the Republican armies against the Communists in an uprising that became a hideous civil war, which only ended in the spring of 1939, a few days before Mussolini sent his troops against Albania in one more warlike gesture, the last before the position became totally unacceptable to the British Government.

It seemed that the passing of 1935 and King George V ushered in a new era of tension. The late King had referred to it in the course of his speech in Westminster Hall three days after his Silver Jubilee celebrations. Adolf Hitler tore up another clause in the Treaty of Versailles in March and his goose-stepping Panzer divisions occupied the Rhineland. No one took much notice; thus encouraged, the scene was set by the wretched little one-time house-decorator to lay his plans for nothing less than the occupation of Europe, the British Isles included.

Was it coincidence that one of the greatest song hits of the year was a number composed by a lovelorn young Hungarian, Laszlo Seress? Translated, it was called *Gloomy Sunday*, and it was said that after hearing it, several young Hungarians, crossed or blighted in love, committed suicide. Certainly it could not be called a cheerful song; neither could a British number that had an even greater success late that autumn: *When The Poppies Bloom Again*. All the bands played it; it was a lament to be sung by a girl, recalling her lover of the first world war, who had died in France. It sounded absurd when sung by a man, but it frequently was.

For those who liked to buy their dance music on records at bargain prices, there was a wide choice, and by no means all the songs were full of foreboding for the future, uneasiness for the present or laments for the past. For one shilling you could obtain six of the top hits of the day played by what was called Primo

Scala's Accordion Band, mostly without lyrics but with two numbers sung (anonymously as a rule, but to those who recognized voices, readily identifiable as Sam Browne, Sam Costa or a new teenage star named Vera Lynn). If you did not care for massed accordions, and preferred your popular tunes played with equal emphasis on the melody and the rhythm, without the least deviation from either, and no vocalist to interrupt the mood thus created, you could invest your shilling in a wide range of piano medleys, usually with obsequious rhythmic accompaniment, by an American who had taken up residence in England in 1922 and was then leader of a small and not outstanding band at the Casani Club. He was Charlie Kunz, a shy being whose piano work mirrored his personality exactly. His Rex records by the band in full are quite sought after by those who collect the recorded work of Vera Lynn, and even today there are many who find his quietly refined piano symposia more redolent of a tense age than the more outgoing music of the big name bands that toured the halls. Charlie Kunz disbanded his orchestra in 1937, at least for recording purposes, and continued to attract huge numbers of fans for his piano solos by recording month after month until arthritis prevented him from further musical activities. Soon afterwards, perhaps not surprisingly, he died, in 1961.

Nor were these the only wares offered in the bargain-basement of the record world. Again for a shilling, Reginald Dixon at the mighty organ of the Blackpool Tower would entertain you with six of the latest songs, about once a quarter, and without vocal choruses, played to some extent in dance tempo. He was a prolific recorder, and a most popular figure at the console of the organ in the huge ballroom for forty years. He also played the organ on several dance-band records by the bands that played in the Tower for the entertainment of holidaymakers, or which appeared in the Winter Gardens in Blackpool. Earlier in the 'thirties, the best-known bandleader based on the famous resort was Bertini, whose band was often accompanied by Reginald Dixon on its Zonophone and Sterno records. (His predecessor in

the early 'twenties bore the striking name of J Woof Gags, but he recorded without the assistance of the organ. This instrument was also used on several Regal records by Larry Brennan from the Winter Gardens.)

Bertini, although always associated in the public mind with his direction of the band in the Blackpool Tower ballroom, was London-born. His real name was Bert Gutsell, but this was less euphonious than the name he chose and under which he became nationally famous, and it also had a Teutonic ring about it that was somewhat unacceptable by the public at the time of his forming a band for the Tower only eight years after the end of World War I. His musicians were not under contract to him, but to the Tower management; consequently, the personnel remained remarkably stable over the years. Bertini remained in control of music in the Tower Ballroom until the end of 1936, when Norman Newman took over. There followed the usual tours, one-night stands, including one tour that reached the Hackney Empire, London, in October, 1937. The following April, Bertini was back in Blackpool with his band, at the North Pier, providing the music for Lawrence Wright's annual *On With The Show*. Two months later, the

North Pier was burnt down and the band, having lost its entire library of scores, removed to the Arcade at the entrance to the Pier, and played from memory.

The last year of peace found Bertini on tour in the north-east in a show called *Strike Up The Band*, and after the war, he continued to direct various bands on tour in that area until his death in 1957. His most famous record, strangely, was not of any particular song hit, but a strange six-minute number by a German composer named Carl Robrecht, bearing the stranger title *Samum*. Sub-titled "A Classical Fox Trot," it was barely in fox-trot time for more than a few bars together, resembling the old mid-Victorian polka as much as it did any of the more modern dance rhythms. Bertini recorded it twice, once for Sterno, once for Zonophone, and both versions sold quite amazingly well at eightpence each.

The principal maker of low-price but still good quality records for the dancing crowds was Jay Wilbur, born Wilbur Blinco, who died in South Africa in 1968. He was first heard of as leader of the small unit in the Tricity Restaurant in London in 1928, and in the autumn of that year, he was appointed Musical Director of Dominion Records. Eighteen months later, the firm crashed, and Jay Wilbur secured a similar post with Imperial Records, continuing to make good tasteful dance music until

Mrs Jack Hylton and her band on the stage (1935).



well into the era of their successor, Rex Records. Wilbur was also a frequent broadcaster from 1936 onwards, particularly remembered today for his *Melody From The Sky* series. On these, as on his records, he was often accompanied on the studio organ by Charles D Smart or his teenage son Harold. Wilbur's band on records was a studio group; it did not vary greatly, but nevertheless it was composed of such men as were available at any given moment, some of whom were under contract to other leaders. Ambrose was one whose rich company of top-grade men provided at least a basis for Jay Wilbur's recording band. Ted Heath recalled frequent sessions for Rex, some of the numbers being his own arrangements. Freddy Gardner, who ranks with Joe Crossmao in the annals of British dance music as among the finest saxophonists this country has ever produced, was also a regular visitor to the Rex studios. When Ambrose discovered that his "hot" clarinet-alto sax-baritone sax player from Indiana, Danny Polo, was recording unofficially with Joe Jeannette, the fine "straight" player who was one of the cornerstones of his band, he was hurt more than angry. "Don't I pay you enough?" he said bitterly. "Aren't you getting enough from me that you need to go and do these other jobs?" But as the great comedian (and band vocalist on many occasions) Leslie Sarony has told us, these low-priced records were marvellous money-spinners, for they sold by the hundreds of thousands to people who wanted the tunes played well, but whose purses simply would not allow them to purchase a record costing twice as much and bearing (say) Ambrose's name, or Jack Jackson's. Royalties might only be a fraction of a penny per disc, and most of them went to the nominal leader, but if he - in this case Jay Wilbur - liked a musician, he would use him again, and that meant more ready cash. In fact, of course, Wilbur was on a regular salary as an employee of Crystalate, but the more he chose his men carefully, the more records were sold to an ever-growing number of people who were becoming more and more able to distinguish the good from the commonplace, and the more the top men were ready to maintain this happy state. Such people as Max Goldberg, Ted Heath, Freddy Gardner, guitarist Joe Young and bassist Dick Escott used to be almost perpetually on call for casual sessions through the 'thirties; but most of them had regular jobs with name bands, usually Ambrose's.

Cheapest of all records in 1936 were the nine-inch ones made by Crystalate specially for Woolworth's under the name Crown (thereby maintaining the royal flavour from Imperial to Rex to Crown). As nothing in Woolworth's cost more than sixpence in those days, that was the price of these excellent discs and Jay Wilbur, under the name of "The Radio Serenaders" (for sweeter, melodic numbers, frequently featuring the Wurlitzer organ) or "The Rhythm Rascals" (for music that was more in the "swing"

idiom) was responsible for arranging most of them, assisted by the nucleus of Ambrose's and other leaders' sidemen. Jack Hylton's wife (using his name with the appropriate prefix "Mrs") also made Crown records for the first year of their eighteen months of life, as did Billy Merrin and his Commanders, an excellent Midlands band that was formed in 1931 in Nottingham. For twenty years Billy Merrin directed his orchestra successfully, then in 1951 disbanded it to become the musical director for stage musicals, including *Black and White Minstrels* on tour in Australia.

Crown and Rex records were indeed quality products at a low price, but the materials of which they were pressed had not the longevity of their contemporaries that were slightly more expensive. This hardly mattered, as most of what they played was not required to last long either; an early example of planned obsolescence. At the same time, Regal Zonophone at a shilling (briefly, from 1935 to 1937) offered big names such as Lew Stone and Billy Cotton, but on finely pressed material. Then in the spring of 1937, Crystalate sold out to Decca, who without ceremony abandoned the Woolworth's Crown record immediately, and Rex (like their rival Regal Zonophone from the EMI stable) were priced at 1s. 3d. That September, with the increase in armaments in a belated attempt to meet the ominous state of affairs in Europe, Rex and Regal were priced at 1s. 6d. The HMV, Decca, Columbia and Parlophone records that had been so jubilantly announcing their eighteen-penny dance-band bargains only two and a half years earlier, peremptorily jacked their prices up to 2s, at which point they remained until Purchase Tax was introduced in October, 1940. Until most of these labels abandoned their dance series altogether in September, 1955, the basic price, and with it the Purchase Tax, was forever rising periodically; it never fell again to anything like what it had been at the outset.

The reason for this was that the basic ingredient in a 78 rpm gramophone record is - or was - shellac, and this also is used in the manufacture of armaments. Thus, during the war, countless millions of shellac discs were gathered in and pulped to make munitions and new records alike (for shellac came from occupied Burma).

Another famous name that was offered to the public on Regal Zonophone records of 1936 and up to 1941 was Joe Loss's. Joshua Alexander Loss first appeared on the British dance-band scene in September, 1930, when he led his first professional band on violin in the Astoria Ballroom in Charing Cross Road. Somewhat hopefully he called it his Harlem Band, but he used only British musicians of the white race. (This apparent misuse of a geographical location is common throughout dance-band history; the Original Memphis Five, as we have seen, were not from Memphis, any more than the California Ramblers were from California or Billy Cotton's Savannah Band - as he called his first -



Joe Loss and his Band (1935).

(EMI

from that city in Georgia. To take a present-day parallel, Tyrannosaurus Rex is not a monster, at least in the dinosaurian sense, and the Small Faces are not notably undersized in their physiognomy!) Joe Loss was featured at the Kit-Cat for two and a half years between January, 1932 and July, 1934, when he returned to the Astoria. At the end of March, 1937 he again left the Astoria and went on tour with great success; and alone among the great bandleaders of the 'thirties, Joe Loss continues to lead a large band to this day. He is much in demand at society functions, and while moving with the times, he nevertheless stamps the finished product with the unmistakable mark of a seasoned craftsman. His big-band, non-vocal dance records of the 'fifties were among the most pleasurable to listen to, as they not only gave the absolutely correct tempo for dancing – they were often labelled "Dancing Time For Dancers" – but were arranged and played with such superb taste as to delight the listener who preferred to sit it out!

In the late 'thirties, Joe Loss offered much the same type of ballroom dancers' delight with a small contingent from his main orchestra. These were of less interest to keen listeners, as they were aimed principally at those who were keen dancers rather than musical enthusiasts. It was at the beginning of the period covered by this chapter that the first records by Victor Silvester and his Ballroom Orchestra were announced by Parlophone. In strict dance tempo, and "strict" is the operative word, they offered an unquestionable appeal to the dancing enthusiast, but there was nothing whatever in the thin treatment of the melody by alto saxophone and violin over the conventional piano, guitar, string bass and drums rhythm to appeal to those who looked beyond the simple requirements of a steady dance tempo, regardless of whether this was a foxtrot, quick-step, waltz or any of the Latin dances. Victor Silvester himself, of course, has for many years been Britain's leading expert in ballroom dancing, so it is hardly surprising that the hundreds of records he made over the twenty years he was making them are of purely utilitarian appeal and nothing more.

When it was noted how successful the first Victor Silvester records were, other dancing experts not unnaturally leapt on the bandwagon. As a result we had Henry Jacques, Maxwell Stewart, Josephine Bradley, Wally Fryer, Norton Collier, Oscar Rabin and Jack Harris at various times and with varying success in terms of sales, all vying with Victor Silvester and Joe Loss and each other to capture some of this quite surprisingly large market. To be fair, a good many records offered as other than strict dance items contained little to inspire the latent terpsichorean urge in anyone, and quite a number were of uninspired performances of stock arrangements issued by the publishers, which went down well when played in a ballroom or a dance hall, but which became boring when repeated on a record. The best bands, of course,

Below: Oscar Rabin's *Romany Band* (1936).

Bottom: Jack Harris



could capture both the active dancers and the passive listeners; I am no dancer, but when I listen to a superlative performance by a band such as Ray Noble's, Jean Goldkette's, Amlrose's or Lew Stone's, or any of the others that I have mentioned in this book as being of star quality, I find it extremely difficult to remain unmoved and unmoving; I have to tap my foot or keep time with one hand or both.

Oscar Rabin was not entirely devoted to the cause of utilitarian dance music, however. His career reached back to 1922, when he led his Romany Five on violin in the Derby Palais de Danse. He took up bass saxophone as a second instrument, and built up a full-sized band over the next decade that eventually secured him a useful position at the Astoria, in the period between Joe Loss's tenure there. He could claim to have one of the longest careers of any British bandleader: in the 'fifties he still had a band, though ill-health forced him to delegate more of the physical side of the work to his guitarist, Harry Davis. He was an early admirer of the methods of Stan Kenton, and his records of some of Kenton's compositions are comparable to those by the composer himself.

Jack Harris, too, was even better known for his full-sized dance orchestras that he led, on violin, in such well-known London establishments as Grosvenor House (1930-1931), the Embassy Club (1931-1932), the Café de Paris (1932-1933), the Monseigneur (1933-1935), the London Casino (1936-1937), Giro's - his was the last band to play there before it closed in March, 1939, the London Casino again, and, in the first winter of the war, El Morocco. In the 'forties, he returned to the States whence he had come in 1927, and is now in charge of the musical arrangements on one of the television shows. He was a member of the pit orchestra of Earl Carroll's famous *Famities* show on Broadway during the middle 'twenties, under the direction of Ross Gorman, the immensely likeable ex-Whiteman saxophonist. While in London, he recorded for many labels, from the inexpensive but good quality Piccadilly label (under the pseudonym "Tunney's Floridians," though whether this was to cash in on the popularity of the heavyweight boxer Gene Tunney will never now be known!) to HMV ten years later in 1938. His records do not command much interest among collectors as a rule; he seldom offered anything in the nature of "hot" arrangements in the late 'twenties or early 'thirties, and the handful of sides he made in the "swing" idiom for HMV between 1937 and 1939 are extremely rare and thus very little known. (They are in fact very good; they are mostly compositions by Sid Phillips, and follow his unique arrangements very commendably.) To Jack Harris belongs the doubtful honour of being the last bandleader to record before the outbreak of war. He made four titles for HMV on September 1, 1939, as Hitler's armies and air force struck at Poland.

One entirely British band that successfully combined the new "swing" style with good straight-

forward dance music was led by Eddie Carroll, whose career in the popular music world began with his work with "Spike" Hughes, the Irish jazz enthusiast, bass player, composer, arranger and bandleader, in 1930. Eddie Carroll formed his own band for the famous Empress Rooms in Kensington after leaving Lew Stone (and two years at the Monseigneur) in 1934. By 1939, he was established at Chez Henri, Charlie Kunz' old venue in the days before he was at the Casani Club, and he had shown the public how well he understood the "swing" idiom by a number of very pleasing records, many of them his own compositions. (At least, most of those credited to him deserved to be; his best-known number, *Harlem*, however, has an unmistakable likeness to *Moten Swing*, a composition from the fertile imagination of a negro pianist from Kansas City named Benny Moten, who had recorded it in 1932, five years before Eddie Carroll produced *Harlem*.)

Once more, I would like to crave the reader's indulgence if I recount a personal story about *Harlem*. (Sir Noël Coward, as the hero of his own play *Private Lives*, comments, "Strange how potent cheap music is." This story is not intended to label - or libel - Eddie Carroll's music as cheap, but it certainly had a potency for me that three and half decades have not diminished.) I was fifteen, and a very shy schoolboy, on holiday in Worthing in the late summer of 1937. I did not mix easily with people of my own age, certainly not with the opposite sex, of which I knew less than Gilbert and Sullivan's novice in a nunnery. On this particular warm September afternoon, however, I was sitting on the beach, reading some trivial school yarn in a paperback, when I became aware of a haunting tune being played quite close to where I sat. I looked up, and saw, a few yards away over the pebbles, a portable wind-up gramophone in use by two shapely girls. They were probably not that much older than I was, but at that time, anyone not actually in baby-clothes seemed many years my senior. These two damsels were in two-piece swimsuits and nowadays would seem grossly overdressed, but to my monastic eyes they epitomized the last word in daring display. It was not the girls, nor their heach wear, however, that attracted me; they could have been old hags in Victorian funeral garb for all it mattered. The record they were playing held my attention fast. The needle ran off at the end and they played it again. When it was finished and I had been entranced by it, one of them got up, stretched, and ran down the shingle into the sea. The other stretched herself out on a towel, and closed her eyes. This was it! My chance for my overburdened curiosity to be satisfied! Gingerly I approached the portable. The record was still on the turntable, and I remember mentally chiding its owners for leaving it thus in the glare of the sun. I got nearer . . . and nearer . . . till at last I could read the label . . . *Harlem*, and underneath a name I had not so far encountered: Eddie Carroll.

I had nothing to write the details on, so I crouched there, committing them to memory, when a pebble slipped away from under my foot and rolled straight towards the sunbathing lass with what seemed to me like a roar of artillery. She sat up suddenly, fixed me with a stare full of suspicion and hostility. (No doubt she feared some kind of unwelcome chatting-up, but need not have worried, if so; all I wanted were the details of that fascinating tune, and I would no more have approached her boldly and asked to see the label than I would have sat on top of the flagpole on the pier.) At that moment her friend returned from her swim, and I beat a hasty retreat, dislodging a few more pebbles in the process. I saw the girls shoot puzzled glances at me as I quickly looked back on my way to the nearest record shop – where I was much more at home than on any beach – but I felt rather like a soldier, out on reconnaissance, having secured the enemy's plans without injury. Whenever I hear *Harlem* to this day, I am taken back to Worthing beach on a summer afternoon long ago, and I sometimes wonder who those two girls were, and what happened to them. They are probably grandmothers by now, but they introduced me to something new in my experience of dance music, and when, later that year, Parlophone issued a record of the Eddie Carroll Swing Music playing Duke Ellington's latest poem in sound, *Cavaseen*, I chose it from all the others, Ellington's own not being released here at the time.

It was about this time that America sent us the first records of a crazy little band called the Original Hoosier Hot Shots. The group itself never came here, but its bright, if rather zany renderings of such works of art as *I Like Bananas Because They Have No Bones* threatened for a time the apparently inviolable supremacy of an equally ludicrous confection that was without doubt the Number One Top Hit of 1936: *The Music Goes 'Round And Around*. It was introduced by Eddie Farley and Mike Riley, respectively the trumpet (and mellophone) and trombone players of a semi-Dixieland band that played at the Onyx Club in New York. Farley could dismember his instrument while still producing some semblance of music from it, and their composition caught the imagination of first the American, then the British public. The redoubtable Jay Wilbur recorded a matchingly crazy impression of how it would sound in various foreign countries, and everywhere anyone went, be it Woolworth's or the May Fair, the music went round and around for weeks and months on end. With lordly fourteen-year-old loftiness, I commented in my diary: "What a dreadful tune it is!" In fact, as a novelty, it had considerably greater merit than some of its contemporaries, the banana song among them. (My wife can recall coming downstairs as a toddler, singing the title line of *The Music Goes 'Round And Around*, which was all she knew of it.)

Instead of the Hoosier Hot Shots, which featured the ocarina, washboard, banjo and other appurten-

ances of very early and (so-regarded at that time) primitive "jazz," under the direction of a gentleman by the name of Ezra Buzzington, Britain produced a band that presaged the coming of Spike Jones and his City Slickers. It was led by a saxophonist from Jack Payne's mid-thirties band named Sid Millward, and it brought the house down when it appeared on the variety circuits throughout the country in the immediate pre-war era. The humour matched the pure "corn" – datedness – of the music. A character with a chalk-white face would stagger up to Millward as he was about to begin the next number, and gasp, "Have you seen a bearse go this way?" Millward would answer that he hadn't, and ask why. "Because I've just fallen out of one!" was the reply that convulsed the audience.

Up to this point, little has been said in this book about the humour provided by the bands; yet this was most certainly one of the many aspects of entertainment that a first-class band would provide during the quarter-century of this survey. From the Original Dixieland's eye-catching teddy-bears, grating musicians and occasional bucolic effects on their instruments right through to the comedy routines of Farley and Riley dismembering a mellophone, via Jack Payne and Henry Hall's "variety novelties," all successful bands leavened their programmes with humour, actual or alleged. Even Ambrose and Harry Roy in their most exclusive May Fair Hotel engagements offered more than straight renderings of sentiment unalloyed. (Ambrose recorded a two-sided version of an American six-eight one-step that with its sardonic humour made as big a hit in England as in its native land: *Elesen More Months And Ten More Days* lightened the burden of the depression early in 1932, to be followed slightly later by a grim piece of buffoonery that all the bands were featuring, *Ain't It Grand To Be Blooming Well Dead?* This was from Leslie Sarony, who afterwards contributed *Wheezy Anna* ("down where the watermelons grow") to the dance band repertoire, and at the Monseigneur, Lew Stone and various members of his band enacted a glorious send-up of the old-time melodrama called *Little Nell*, and four or five years later, in 1938, Harry Roy wreaked havoc with the Al Jolson supercharged tear-jerker *Sonny Boy*.)

It was in Ambrose's band that there was a good deal of unofficial legpulling on the stand among the musicians themselves. Sylvester Ahola tells how, during the playing of the National Anthem at the close of the night's performance, Ted Heath would play his trombone deliberately out of tune into "Hooley's" ear in a teasing attempt to throw his playing out; and Joe Brannelly, the American banjoist and guitarist, is on record as inadvertently embarrassing his employer, when one of the patrons of the May

Fats Waller.

[EMI



Fair asked Brannelly, in between two numbers, where Ambrose was (noticing he had left the stand). Joe, sitting at the end of the front line, was so accustomed to being asked what the last number played was, did not hear the question above the general hubbub of the huge ballroom, assumed it was the usual one and said, "Makin' Whoopee!"

A recording by Eddy Duchin and his Orchestra, though intended to be mildly funny, achieved a great deal of notoriety, through its having been issued in England one day and withdrawn the next at the insistence of the authorities who in those days (1938) guarded the public morals with the tenacity of bulldogs. The song was *Ol' Man Mose*, a number which Louis Armstrong had helped to compose and popularize a couple of years earlier. There were several other records of this pseudo-hillbilly number, all of them completely innocent; the writer firmly believes that the Duchin version is also, but one critic apparently heard Patricia Norman, Duchin's girl vocalist at the time, interpolate in what might now be termed "full frontal" fashion a repeated Anglo-Saxon expletive; to the pure all things are pure, however, and all she apparently says in the refrains is, "Mose kicked the bucket, buck-buck-bucket . . . oh-h-h th' bucket," in the same way as other singers have done since, without reproach. (There is one side by the Ipana Troubadours on Columbia where the vocalist indulges in much the same sort of "what-did-he-say" eyebrow-raising lyrics - if the ears care to interpret them thus. That was in 1926, however, when reproducing sound from records, however good they were technically, was less revealing in detail, so it passed unnoticed.) This hypersensitive critic drew attention to the apparent verbal lapse by Miss Norman, and the disc was instantly withdrawn. Few records can have had a shorter life in the catalogues of any company; it commands quite a high price among collectors of rarity for its own sake.

The gravity of the times was lightened to some considerable extent by the coming to England of Thomas "Fats" Waller, one of American's most welcome exports. "Fats" had been known as a pianist and organist around Harlem and Chicago for years, since he was a teenager. A man of colossal build, and an appetite for food and drink, which latter usually took the form of whisky which he termed "liquid ham and eggs," to match his enormous frame, it was spell-binding to watch those huge hands extract from the keyboard some of the most enchanting and delicate music. His speciality was "guying" the sentimental "pops" of the day; he was the leader of a bright, sometimes rather raucous little sextet that made dozens of records between 1934 and 1942, which sounded hilarious then and still seem so now, thirty years or so afterwards. "Fats," at the piano, bubbling with *joie-de-vivre*, would roar, "If you break my heart I'll break your jaw and then die," in the course of dealing with *It's A Sin To Tell A Lie*, perhaps one of

the most obvious "pub-crawler" waltz ballads of all time. In Irving Berlin's *You're Laughing At Me*, he plays some charming phrases on celeste, then towards the end of the vocal part, announces, "You've got me worried and I'm all at sea, for while you're crying at me, an' I'm crying for you, and you're laughin' at me, get it straight now, whatcha gonna do? Are you all right? Well all right then." The muted trumpet obbligato gives up completely at the words "Get it straight now," leaving "Fats" to sort out his blundering as best he can, but it is a very good best. His *Crying Mood* is a brilliant piece of burlesque which ends with some "hammy" sobs from "Fats" who makes the piano echo his bogus misery. "Boo-hoo," he announces, "yeah!"

Though the restrictions in force at that time prevented "Fats" Waller from bringing his band, they did not stop his appearing as a solo act, and he received a warm welcome wherever he appeared. He and Louis Armstrong must rank as the first negro jazz soloists to make an impression on the British public at large, and such was the impact of "Fats'" personality that when a five-record LP set of several dozen of his best numbers was issued recently in France, it sold by the tens of thousands and was awarded the Grand Prix de l'Academie du Jazz, the Grand Prix de l'Academie Charles Cros, and the Grand Prix de l'Academie du Disque Français. This, nearly thirty years after the death of the artist himself, at the age of thirty-nine, of influenzal bronchial pneumonia, on December 15, 1943, on a train entering Kansas City. His best-known compositions, such as *Ain't My Behaviour*, *I've Got A Feeling I'm Falling*, *Honeyuckle Rose* and *Squeeze Me* have long been part of the standard jazz and dance-band repertoire; they bridge the gap, as Waller's own playing does, between the out-and-out "hot" jazz style and the easily-grasped melodic dance tune format.

"Fats" loved to play the organ, and made a fine set of negro spirituals on the instrument in one of the EMI studios in London. They are played with simplicity and reverence, though not in a dull-straight-laced manner; the original negro concept of a spiritual was that it should uplift the listener, not crush him or her under a dull, dead weight of platitudinous rubbish. Without words, these performances can be regarded as timeless sermons from a man who, for all his feckless, reckless way of living outwardly, was at heart deeply religious. One of his recording dates while in London in August, 1938, included a number of British musicians who would probably not have been called on to record but for "Fats." So much for the curious idea that if visiting musicians made records in London, native Britishers would thereby be deprived of part of their livelihood! Among these local characters was a Scottish trom-

George Chisholm as a young man.

[Rex Harris





Right: Tommy Dorsey (1936).

bonist named George Chisholm, now famed not only as a superb musician but as an equally great comedian, with a sense of humour as crazy as "Fats'" own. The drummer on this occasion was another overseas visitor who has since – long since – become part of the British entertainment scene, Edmundo Ros.

The session was a lively one indeed, as was any where "Fats" Waller was involved. One of the tunes selected for recording was *Murie*, *Maestro*, *Please*, which was a big hit in America and was to be included in a Palladium revue called *These Foolish Things*, starring Frances Day and the original Crazy Gang. No gang was crazier than the one-man gang at the keyboard that Sunday morning in the recording studio, however; "Fats" lampooned the lyrics unmercifully.

Satire has always been popular as a form of humour on the stage ever since the days of Rome and Athens, of course. In the dance-band world of the 'thirties, with bandleaders vying with each other for the plaudits of the crowd, each trying to establish his own following by some readily recognizable characteristic (nowadays known as a "gimmick," though the exact

etymological derivation of this word is not certain), it was not too difficult for any band with the necessary technical resources among its members to pull the legs of the others. Hence there was a series of three Victor records made in 1937 and 1938 by Richard Himber and his Essex House Orchestra. Himber had been Sophie Tucker's pianist in the early 'twenties, before Ted Shapiro came on the scene to stay in that position for the rest of Sophie's life, and the orchestra Himber led was not noted as a rule for anything but quiet, superbly polished, unobtrusive dinner-dance music. In the *Parade Of The Bands* series, however, all the leading band personalities of the day come in for some brilliant impressions that poke fun at the musical trade-marks each employed. Thus *Hot Lips* is played exactly as Paul Whiteman's ex-trumpeter Henry Busse did (he wrote it); *Vilia* from *The Merry Widow* is breathed from an alto saxophone in excruciating likeness to the playing of Wayne King, the Chicago sax-playing bandleader known as "The Waltz King"; *Dinah* owes everything to Benny Goodman's Quartet, vibraphone and all; on the other side, *Marie* is offered virtually indistinguishably from Tommy





Dorsey's suave, high-pitched trombone version; *Sugar Blues* is quacked out in merciless copying of the style of trumpeter Clyde McCoy, who adopted it as his signature tune in 1931; and to end with, *Can I Forget You?* is bleated out in exact replica of Guy Lombardo's vibrato-laden saxophone section, complete with sobbing vocalist . . . and so on.

This seems the right point at which to comment on the career of one of the above-named leaders, Tommy Dorsey. Although his life-span was a matter of fifty-one years exactly, almost to the day, in that time Tommy Dorsey established a style of brass playing that for sheer beauty of tone has never been surpassed in the dance-band world. Although as a person, Dorsey was brash and short-tempered, he held his men together and insisted that only the best was good enough for them – and from them, even as his late employer, Paul Whiteman, had. (Dorsey had worked with Whiteman for a time late in 1927, with his gentler brother, Jimmy, on reeds and sometimes trumpet.) The brothers came from the coal-mining town of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, where Jimmy was born on Leap Year Day, 1904, and Tommy on November 19, 1905. Their father was a brass player and both boys were taught to play a variety of brass instruments in early childhood.

Their first professional band of any importance was the Scranton Sirens, but both were members of Jean Goldkette's principal band in Detroit in 1924, and both gained wide experience of the business in this and Paul Whiteman's orchestras, as well as the California Ramblers, before forming the Dorsey Brothers' Orchestra in 1928. This was composed of some of the "hottest" talent in New York at the time, and the negroid trumpet and trombone playing of the younger Dorsey matched the supple clarinet and alto saxophone work of the elder in a way that delighted all the critics and connoisseurs wherever their records were issued. Bing Crosby sang some vocals for them, anonymously, Glenn Miller did the bulk of the arrangements, Eddie Lang supplied a lifting rhythm supported by various front-rank bass men, and the general sound of the performances suggested a most fraternal state of affairs.

It lasted fairly consistently until the late summer of 1935, when the band was in its fourth month at the Glen Island Casino, a roadhouse near New York. A disagreement over the correct tempo at which a number should be played resulted in a public demonstration of violence, Jimmy taking over most of the band as it stood, Tommy forming a more or less new one by assuming leadership of a band that had been led by Joe Haymes. Of the two, Tommy's was the more consistently "hot" or "swing" styled; Jimmy offered many fine performances (on Decca records), but Tommy's, on Victor (HMV) usually sounded

richer. He evolved his world-famous high-pitched trombone style during this period, and after a record of a slow ballad featuring this method of playing, called *I'm Getting Sentimental Over You*, he began to be known as "The Sentimental Gentleman Of Swing."

Almost as if in resentment at this label, Tommy Dorsey formed a band-within-a-band, as had Benny Goodman with his Trio and later his Quartet, Quintet and Sextet, and Bob Crosby had his Bob Cats. Dorsey called his eight-piece group "Tommy Dorsey and his Clambake Seven," and whereas Bob Crosby's Bob Cats used mainly jazz standards of days gone by, appealing thus mostly to the growing, but still minority, number of jazz connoisseurs, Tommy Dorsey aimed his Clambake Seven at exactly the same clientele as his Orchestra: the ordinary dancers and record purchasers who like their sentiment with a bit of "hot" spice. Thus we find among the Seven's repertoire such diverse numbers as *The Music Goes 'Round And Around* (on which the fifteen-year-old vocalist Edyth Wright, hearing the clarinet take a solo, asked how the music can go 'round and around on a straight instrument) to an exciting and uncompromising Dixieland version of *Chinatown*, with no vocal, all by way of ephemeral ballads such as *You're My Desire* which received a typical Tommy Dorsey going-over. There was none of the Sentimental Gentleman about his work with the Seven, either; it was good, masculine, full-blooded wide-open horn all the way, except on *After You*, a trivial film tune of 1937 on which as an experiment, Tommy inserted a trumpet mouthpiece into his trombone and produced a strangely beautiful sound quite unique in the annals of dance music.

Jimmy Dorsey did not have a band-within-a-band as such; his drummer in the early days, Ray McKinley, made four Dixieland stylings with the appropriate instrumentation under his own name, but only in 1949 did Jimmy Dorsey climb on the Dixieland revival bandwagon with what he – or his publicity agent – called, rather clumsily, his Original Dorseyland Jazz Band. It meant nothing; but by this time, his brother's Clambake Seven was a watered-down, rather emaciated version of the full-sized band, and this pleased neither the connoisseurs of jazz nor the dancing public to any degree. On November 26, 1956, Tommy Dorsey choked to death at the meal-table. A little less than seven months later, Jimmy died of cancer. There had been a reconciliation in 1953, and a film supposedly based on their lives in music entitled *The Fabulous Dorseys*. It was the usual Hollywood box-office yarn, and it had a stupid title, for "fabulous" means "that which belongs to legend or fiction, and has no factual existence." The thousands of records the brothers made, jointly and severally, testify to this day that in the 'twenties and 'thirties, yes and beyond, here was a pair of musicians who had helped to make jazz acceptable to the masses without playing down to them, as Paul Whiteman had tended to do, yet

without debasing themselves. Tommy in particular showed that, quite apart from his magnificent work on his own Clambake Seven records, he was still able to blow one of the "hottest" trombones this side of Dixieland when he joined Bunny Berigan (whom he did not like), "Fats" Waller (whom he did, like everyone else did) and others in a completely unrehearsed pair of titles under the name of "A Jam Session At Victor." (A "jam session" was a getting together of straight dance musicians who could and wished to play "hot" for the sole purpose of doing just that - without rehearsal or written scores, just a few mutually agreed ideas on routine; so many bars ensemble, so many bars trumpet, middle eight by clarinet, modulation to a different key for whole trombone chorus, and so on. Once this sketchy routine was agreed on, off they all would go, and some lively music often resulted from musicians whose admiration for each other's individual talent would not allow them to cause musical mayhem by playing just any old phrases. The results were frequently much more of an incentive to dance, too.)

The same month as the above-mentioned "jam session" took place (March, 1937) also witnessed an extraordinary event in the huge Paramount Theatre in New York. Beginning on March 3, 1937, Benny Goodman and his Orchestra, with the Trio consisting of negro pianist Teddy Wilson, drummer Gene Krupa from Chicago, and Goodman himself, plus the Quartet which was the Trio augmented by the negro vibraphonist Lionel Hampton, opened as a stage presentation to accompany a Claudette Colbert film. The management were amazed to note, early in the morning, a long queue of teenagers anxious to attend the performance. They didn't come to see Miss Colbert; they wanted Benny Goodman, his Swing Music, the lively rhythm that proclaimed in unabashed glee that the depression was at last over. The brilliant presentation of the band and its associated groups brought the house down in a frenzy of near-riot. "Swing," someone remarked, "is here to stay." So it was, for a decade anyway.

Benny Goodman and his Orchestra made several films. The first was *The Big Broadcast Of 1937*, followed a year later by *Hollywood Hotel*. Both of these demonstrated what each aspect of the Goodman band was like. Much adulation has been heaped on the band, the Trio and the Quartet, and vastly extravagant claims have been made for the originality of all three. The originality of the band lay in its quite open espousal of the cause of "hot" jazz blended with straight dance music, which it performed with superb *flair* and musicianship, as distinct from most other bands of the early and mid-thirties which seemed to be stuck in the treading of their own making. There had been other clarinet-piano-drums trios a decade earlier, of negro musicians whose technical limitations were nothing like as great as some critics have suggested, and who gave a glowing account of their



Above: Gene Krupa (1937).

Opposite page: Top: Artie Shaw and his Orchestra.

Bottom: Irving Aaronson and his Commanders (1926).



music; the Goodman Trio was a marvel of technical display and rapport between the members, but generally it seemed a clinical, cold kind of music. The Quartet, which was almost dominated by the shower of golden bell-like notes from Lionel Hampton's vibraphone, was indeed original and unique. The extra voice added considerable interest to each performance, and the unerring precision and taste with which the Quartet played impressed even those who professed dislike for "swing" music.

A musician as successful as Benny Goodman was in 1937 could hardly last long without some pretty stern rivalry, and it came in the form of a strange new group led by Artie Shaw, a clarinet and alto saxophone player who had been a member of Irving Aaronson's Commanders nearly a decade before. Aaronson was a rarity, in that he had brought a band to London in *advance* of any recordings, and still had been quite successful. Aaronson's chief claim to fame among record collectors lies in the long-held belief that Bing Crosby sang on a rather hilarious side made by the Commanders in 1929 called *Outside*; actually the voice was that of one of his trumpet players, Charlie Trotta. Another voice on the same record is that of Tony Pastor, the tenor saxophonist who later worked with Artie Shaw's own band, and later still, in the 'forties, had his own band. Pastor, whose real name was Pestritta, died in 1969.

Artie Shaw, born in 1910, soon proved himself to be a musician able to contribute interesting music to pick-up bands on record dates, was also at various times in the early 'thirties a member of the bands led by Paul Specht, Roger Wolfe Kahn and Fred Rich. (He also found time to run a farm in Pennsylvania; twenty years later he had his own farm in New York State.) Oddly enough, in view of the fact that he was a saxophonist and clarinetist himself, he did not like saxophones in dance bands, and his first successful venture under his own name was with a string quintet in 1935. From this he received enough financial backing to build a band, using three brass, one saxophone (Pastor), two violins, viola, 'cello and the conventional four rhythm. Shaw led on clarinet; the sound was completely different from anything then to be heard in the dance-band world, for though many of the big "name" bands that had not embraced the "swing" idiom used strings, they did so in conjunction with four, even five saxophones.

Despite a number of recordings and a successful débauch in Boston, this Shaw orchestra was not the huge draw that he had hoped; so he decided to compete with the Dorseys, Benny Goodman and the rest by forming what was then a conventional big band – and no strings attached, literally. This became famous for the "biting" sound of the newly-recruited saxophone team, the exact antithesis of the Guy Lombardo type of sound, and in 1938 Artie Shaw scored a resounding hit with his record of a Cole Porter song that had been a feature of a show called *Jubilee*. The number was

Begin The Beguine, a dead-cert winner with all the ingredients for success: a wistful lyric that told a story set to a lilting, seductive Latin beat, even though the chorus was sixty-four bars long, just twice the conventional length. The Shaw record had no lyrics, and by the time his magnificent brass, saxophone and rhythm sections had come to grips with the melody, and Shaw had added a high-singing, clarinet solo on top, there was precious little romance left either. At that, it was still a success on both sides of the Atlantic.

Nothing succeeds like the kind of success now enjoyed by the Artie Shaw band, but after an enforced rest while his tonsils were successfully removed in the summer of 1939, the leader suddenly broke the band up and handed the leadership to one of his tenor saxophonists, George Auld. He disappeared to Mexico during the winter of that year, and when he reappeared, it was in California, with the object of building yet another band. It turned out to be a huge concert orchestra on much the same lines as Paul Whiteman's of a decade or more earlier, for it had six brass, a french horn player, flute, oboe, eight violins, three violas, two 'cellos, the usual four rhythm – but only five reeds, and one of those played bass clarinet! The size of the new Artie Shaw Orchestra was subsequently reduced somewhat, and he too followed, albeit belatedly, the custom of having a small group from the main orchestra to play clever arrangements of standards and specially written numbers in what seemed then to be "advanced" style. Whereas the conventional thirteen- or fourteen-piece "swing" band usually had its small contingent of four to (more usually) seven men, Shaw's thirty-two-piece aggregation produced only a quintet, which he called his Gramercy Five. It consisted of trumpet, guitar, bass, drums and harpsichord, with Shaw himself leading on clarinet. The harpsichord lent a new tonal flavour to the music, and the group made some very attractive records.

The restless Artie Shaw, however, disbanded this orchestra in 1941 and started yet again, using negro musicians such as Henry Allen or "Hot Lips" Page on trumpet; but when America entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Shaw joined the US Navy, led a Service band on tours of the Pacific, and was discharged for health reasons two years later. Throughout the 'forties he had various other bands, mostly built on what had been conventional lines. He had various wives, some of them well-known beauties of the film world (he appeared with his band in a film himself in 1941; it was called *Second Chorus*, and it is remembered chiefly now for the *Concerto For Clarinet* which Artie Shaw composed for it. It was rather an exhibitionist piece, concluding with the soloist reaching ever higher into the tonal stratosphere till the sound ceased to be acceptable as

Count Basie.

[Rex Harris]



normal music and became merely a demonstration of Shaw's undoubted and never-questioned technique).

Artie Shaw revived his Gramercy Five idea in 1953, but a new generation had grown up that had no knowledge of the music that had pleased its parents fifteen years before, and once more, Shaw retired in disgust (he was frequently outspoken in his comments on the dance music scene). This time he emigrated to Spain, where he devoted his time to writing books; his autobiography, *The Trouble With Cinderella*, was published in 1952, and this was followed a few years later by a novel entitled *I Love You, I Hate You, Drop Dead*. This could easily be said to summarize Shaw's attitude to the music that brought him fame and fortune; he now lives in Connecticut writing for the theatre, having sold his Spanish property in 1962. A comment by a young admirer on hearing Larry Shields, clarinetist of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band at the time of the come-back by that group in 1936, which coincided with Shaw's first modest success: "Gee, he's great! He's better than Artie Shaw! Why doesn't someone discover him?"

Throughout the later 'thirties, at the height of the "swing" craze, there were several nationally and internationally famous bands that consisted entirely of members of the negro race. Apart from Duke Ellington, there was a bandleader from New Jersey by the name of "Count" Basie, and one from Missouri named Jimmie Lunceford, both of whose bands enjoyed great fame. Ellington and Basie are remarkable indeed inasmuch as they have never left the band world despite the complete general change in popular taste; the quality of their music is such that both can always command an audience, and both have frequently visited England with their bands in the years since the ending of the Musicians' Union ban in the mid-fifties. Lunceford, however, having experienced great success up to and throughout the war, found himself and his band somewhat less in demand as the end of the European and Asiatic conflicts brought about a new demand for different music. He collapsed and died while signing autographs, at the age of forty-five, in 1947. His band toured Sweden, but never reached England owing to the ban; his records had quite reasonable success here on the whole, among the best remembered being *For Dancers Only*, with its frenzied high-reaching trumpet solo, and *Blues In The Night*.

William Basie was first heard on record as the pianist in Bennie Moten's Kansas City Orchestra in 1929, after the leader gave up directing the band from the keyboard. Basie was nicknamed "Count" early in his career; there was pianist "Duke" Ellington and pianist Earl Hines (his real name); so why not a pianist known as "Count"? (In the post-war era there was also a pianist known as "Sir Charles" Thompson.) When Bennie Moten died after an operation on his tonsils in April, 1935, his younger brother Ira (nicknamed "Buster") took over the band, and Basie left soon afterwards. He formed his own band with some

of his late colleagues from the Kansas City Orchestra for an engagement at the Reno Club there. John Hammond, a pioneer American enthusiast for jazz (and serious music) heard them broadcast, initiated their first national tour and can fairly be said to have launched the Count Basie Orchestra. An engagement at the Grand Terrace, Chicago, was followed by a longer one in New York, first at the famous Roseland, then at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem.

The Bennie Moten band had been noteworthy for its relaxed, easy rhythm, closely affiliated to the syncopation of ragtime, and in its earliest days, something of this character was perceptible in the Count Basie Orchestra. One critic commented that it sounded as if it was running on ball-bearings, in addition to which the warmth of the saxes and the precision of the brass team made a glowing sound that distinguished the band from its contemporaries. One of the first records by the Basie band was typical not only of the group but of the style of some of the purely instrumental numbers that were popular at that time. It was *Doggie' Around*, and it demonstrated the "riff," a phrase of just a few notes repeated in different tones by different sections of the band, sometimes as a background to a soloist or vocalist (which could be very effective), all too frequently as foreground material, which made a very monotonous effect unless used very judiciously. The amateur instrumentalists that haunted the Rhythm Clubs of those days - small gatherings, usually in rooms over or under pubs, where connoisseurs of "swing" music would gather and listen to their favourite music (on record) or a fairly reasonable facsimile of it (live) - took this simple strain to their hearts and their instruments, and the programme at a Rhythm Club in the days before and in the early part of the war would hardly be complete without its performance of several dozen choruses of *Doggie' Around* by the resident band. This might consist of trumpet, three tenor saxophones, piano, two guitars, bass and drums. The resulting cacophony had to be heard to be believed. It was perhaps the forerunner of the present-day conception of artistic licence expressed in the inelegant phrase "doing your own thing." No one attempted to dance to those proceedings; that was simply not done. You listened - or you left.

Deliberately smart little instrumental numbers became quite the fashion for dance music about the time when the "swing" craze was at its height and the reigning "King of Swing" (Benny Goodman) could discern the first faint cracks under his throne. For a short time, the vogue was for a kind of programmatic dance music that had no song to tell a story, but in which the composition itself set a scene suggested by the title. (In light concert and teashop music twenty years before in England, Albert Ketelbey had swept to fame with pieces such as *In A Monastery Garden*, with chorus of *Kyrie Elison* chanted by such members of the orchestra as were sufficiently gifted

vocally to perform the task; in *A Persian Market*, where the erstwhile "monks" became beggars chanting "Bakhsheesh, bakhsheesh, inch' Allah!" and in *A Chinese Temple Garden*, in which no one sang, but where the percussionist had a wonderful time with his largest and most resonant cymbal.)

The chief exponent of this type of work applied to "swing" and dance music generally was an American pianist and composer named Raymond Scott. In the autumn of 1937, his *Twilight in Turkey*, followed in quick succession by *Toy Trumpet*, *Power House* and *Dinner Music For A Pack Of Hungry Cannibals* caught the public fancy. His own recordings of these quaint little pieces were on a label that at the time had no outlet in England, but that did not deter bandleaders of the quality of Ambrose, Joe Loss and Billy Cotton from offering first-class performances of them. Raymond Scott's titles became more and more flamboyant: *Reckless Night On Board An Ocean Liner* was followed by *Boy Scout In Switzerland*, *Bumpy Weather Over Newark* and *In A Subway Far From Ireland* among others. One of his greatest successes, however, was not at all original. Entitled *In An 18th Century Drawing-Room*, it relied for its melody on the theme of a movement from a Mozart piano sonata. Eventually, Raymond Scott expanded his Quintet into a conventional large band, and included in its repertoire a wide selection of the popular ballads of the time, with Nan Wynn to sing them.

Raymond Scott's principal admirer seems to have been another pianist with slightly odd ideas for titles; he was Bert Shefter, and his Rhythm Octet was noteworthy for its inclusion of such former stars as Adrian Rollini on vibraphone and Herb Quigley on drums. Typical Shefter titles were *Chopin's Ghost*, *Burglar's Revenge*, *SOS*, *Farmer In A Dilemma* and *Deserted Desert*.

The greatest exponent of programme music in the modern dance idiom was, as always, Duke Ellington. After the success of *Mood Indigo* (1930) and *Solitude* (1934) which became song-hits that all the bands played on both sides of the Atlantic, he produced beautiful numbers such as *Caravan* (1937), *Clarinet Lament* (1936) and *Just Another Dream* (1939); he also wrote the very successful popular ballad, *I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart*.

The point to remember about Ellington's music is that it rarely descended to the level of gimmicks to get its meaning across; perhaps that is why it did not meet with the sort of success that came the way of some bands of which nothing has been heard in many years, but which were enormously popular during the years immediately preceding the second world war. There was Blue Barron, for example; he was a trombonist whose regular trade-mark was to have his vocalist sing the main part of the theme of whatever number the band was playing as an introduction to that number. Barron is reported to have exploded in a burst of invective against the "swing" idiom, to the effect that it was "the dirty story counterpointed and

set to music." Such a comment seems as infantile as it is meaningless; but one wonders what Blue Barron would think of some of the productions of the 'seventies.

There was also Shep Fields and his Rippling Rhythm. Their trade-mark was to begin each number with a chirping noise produced by blowing a whistle in a glass of water. The rhythm itself did not ripple; for that, it is necessary to go to a band such as Count Basie's or Bob Crosby's, whose roots were firmly in the soil of good "hot" music and whose rhythm rippled naturally because it could not help itself once its expert practitioners began playing. Along with this there was Gray Gordon and his Tic-Toc Rhythm. It would hardly strain the imagination to suppose (correctly) that here each number began with a metronome setting the beat. Perhaps the best known of the "Mickey Mouse" bands, as the connoisseurs disdainfully termed them, was that of Sammy Kaye. Billed as "Swing and Sway with Sammy Kaye," the band did not play in the "swing" idiom, but merely offered good straightforward dance music, which stemmed directly from the "collegiate" style of the early Hal Kemp and Fred Waring bands. The most popular comedy band in America during the late 'thirties was undoubtedly that of Kay Kyser, who ran a radio programme in which he introduced his "College of Musical Knowledge." He conducted a musical quiz among members of his audience, "ticking" their replies with "That's right, you're wrong" or "That's wrong, you're right" or however the "victim" answered Kyser's questions, which he phrased in the form of a statement, adding, "Right or wrong?" He probably contributed quite considerably to the musical education of young America of the time, by these "music lessons without tears"; he made a film called *That's Right, You're Wrong*, which reached England in 1940, but Kay Kyser and his band never did so in person.

Strangely, in view of the mutual ban on Anglo-American band exchanges, our own Sid Phillips made the journey to New York in 1938 and actually directed there a band recruited from American musicians. His superb arrangements for Ambrose had pre-

Reginald Forythe and his New Music (1934).



ceded him, and among them had been several of his own compositions. Some of these had fanciful titles, such as *An Amazon Goes A-Wooing*, *Message From Mars* and *Night Ride*; he also wrote a number with a strong Congolese flavour called *Bwanga*, and for the augmented Ambrose orchestra, a somewhat extended work with a Mexican setting, *Escapada*. Born in London in 1907, Sid Phillips had his own small band as long ago as 1925, and with this he toured the Continent and recorded there before making any sides in London! He won the fifth Open London Dance Band contest at the "Q" Palais, Kew, on December 8, 1927, with his six-piece Melodians, on which the ever-present *Melody Maker* commented at the time: "The Melodians are a fine band, and worthy of a job anywhere. They excel in 'hot' playing of a not too advanced type. Their style is good, and they produce a 'peppy' rhythm. . . . Their tone is good and their performances tuneful and musically." The accompanying photograph shows the band striking what the magazine was wont to describe scornfully as a "jazzy" pose (ie the pianist is standing, one hand on the keys, the other raised as if waving to the audience; the drummer is standing and grinning at him, and the banjoist, looking for all the world like the film comedian Harold Lloyd in straw hat and horn-rimmed spectacles, has his right hand apparently having pulled a string about a foot away from the neck of his instrument, while the leader, arms outstretched, wears a shiny top hat at a rakish angle).

After many recordings for the old Edison Bell Winner and eight-inch Radio labels, the Melodians, having grown into a much larger dance band, were disbanded, and Sid Phillips joined Lawrence Wright, the music publishers, as staff arranger. By 1933 he was playing all the reeds with Ambrose, principally clarinet, alto and baritone, and although he did not play in the band after August, 1937, he supplied arrangements and new numbers for the next two years. When war came, he served in Intelligence, as his talents are by no means confined to music. He is multi-lingual and an excellent boxer, among other accomplishments.

Just as America produced its "screwball" composers and arrangers, musicians and bandleaders (the last two are not necessarily synonymous!), so in England there was at least one musician whose ideas were at least ten years ahead of his time. He was a West Indian pianist, composer and arranger named Reginald Foresythe, and he presaged the coming of Raymond Scott and Bert Shefter by at least four years. His music has a strange unworldliness, weird and at times barely intelligible to the casual listener. It was listed by the companies that recorded it (Columbia and Decca) under the general heading of "Dance Music," but it offered little incentive to dance, except perhaps to those who preferred exhibition dancing. His musicians were for the most part dance-band men, but he fearlessly examined the possibilities of

such unconventional instruments as oboe, bassoon and flute. His music was not loud and brash, but strangely restrained, almost self-effacing; it repaid the careful listener, and no doubt repelled some of those who were curious to find out what pieces called *The Duke Insists*, *Bit, Volcanic* (sub-titled *Eruption For Orchestra*) and *The Autocrat Before Breakfast*, amongst others, could possibly be like. The answer is they were not like anything else; they were, as the record label read, The New Music of Reginald Foresythe. The only number that made any sort of general appeal was called *Serenade For A Wealthy Widow*. This was widely played and recorded, including one arrangement for Paul Whiteman's orchestra. Early in 1935, Reginald Foresythe visited New York and made some records there with a hand-picked group that included Benny Goodman and Gene Krupa.

Goodman's famous drummer left the band on March 3, 1938, and formed one of his own that was very successful for a number of years. Apart from its showman-leader, its principal claim to general fame rests with its vocalist Anita O'Day, who joined the band in 1941 and has long held a special place in the affections of the followers of so-called "modern jazz." Her vocal contortions had to be seen as well as heard to be believed, and in the famous film *Jazz On A Summer's Day*, made in 1959, Miss O'Day was seen as well as heard.

They were all doing it by the end of the 'thirties; all the established jazz stars who had been engulfed and submerged by the Depression into playing conventional straight dance music were now blossoming forth as "swing" bandleaders in their own right. Jack Teagarden, greatest of blues trombonists, had spent five years with Paul Whiteman alongside Bill Rank, and when his contract expired in December, 1938, he quit to build a band that was used, two years later, to provide a little authenticity to a better-than-average Hollywood production called *Birth Of The Blues*. Teagarden, tall, dark, handsome and quietly spoken, proved quite at home as a small-part actor, but the star of the film was his old friend Bing Crosby. Mary Martin played opposite Bing; everyone who saw the film will remember their light-hearted trio, *The Waiter* (Bing Crosby), *The Porter* (Jack Teagarden) and *The Uptown Maid* (Mary Martin).

Red Nichols was another old-timer who launched out with a new big band in 1939. He had had a large group five or six years earlier, doing one-nighters on seemingly endless tours, but his name appeared very infrequently on records, and he made no films. Most of his English admirers probably thought he was retired, doing another job or even dead, but Red had never quit his first love. He had a haunting signature tune written for him by Harry Warren, who had contributed dozens of tuneful numbers to the popular

The young Woody Herman, around 1936.





Above: Kees Johnson.
Right: Brian Lawrence.

repertoire over the previous fifteen or twenty years. Red Nichols' signature tune was *Weil Of The Winds*, a plaintive, haunting melody which Nichols played with his trumpet muted. It was very effective, especially as the sobbing elegiac melody seemed to foretell the misery and suffering that was by then only a few weeks away.

When his little daughter Dorothy was stricken with polio, Red Nichols gave up playing and went to work in a shipyard; the story, somewhat embellished in the usual manner of Hollywood, is told in the film *The Five Pennies*, with Danny Kaye playing the part of Nichols, but the music heard when Kaye appears to be playing is by Red himself. After the war, and with his daughter's return to something like health, Red Nichols reorganized his Five Pennies, up-dating the group and finding considerable success in Los Angeles and New York, and all points between. He died suddenly, at the age of sixty, on June 28, 1965, leaving a legacy of thousands of records made with all kinds of bands in over forty years as a professional musician.

Another sideman from a famous big band who branched out on his own, as early as 1936, was Woodrow "Woody" Herman. In the early 'thirties, he had been a clarinet and alto saxophone player in Isham Jones's band, and when Jones decided to retire from bandleading, Herman assumed leadership of

what was then called "The Band That Plays The Blues." (The repertoire included many of the then current hits; it was by no means exclusively restricted to blues tunes.) Woody Herman had also been responsible for an occasional vocal with Isham Jones's Orchestra, and he contributed several of these to his own performances. His band was different from the rest in that, at the beginning and for some years, he featured Joe Bishop, composer of a beautiful slow number called *Blue Prelude* that Bing Crosby and many others recorded. Bishop was a fine arranger, but his instrument was the flügel-horn, a kind of french horn, and this sonorous voice in the ensemble gave a unique touch of new tone-colour.

In England, George Scott-Wood had used a french horn sparingly and very delightfully as long ago as 1933; he began his professional career in dance music with the Five Omega Collegians as far back as 1927, and after his term of office with Jay Whidden, he became one of the musical directors for EMI Records. Some of his most popular records were made with two entirely different groups. He directed the London Piano-Accordion Band – he was a fine performer on this instrument himself, as well as a good pianist, recording as a soloist in both capacities – and with the Six Swingers, a kind of politely-polished Dixieland group composed of leading dance-band musicians such as Max Goldberg, Ted Heath and Freddy Gardner among many others.

Phil Green was a colleague of Scott-Wood in the EMI studios, recording all kinds of popular music. One of his most successful offerings was a sextet called *The Ballyhooligans*, consisting of clarinet and four rhythm, with Green on the extra piano. The personnel varied, as did those of the Six Swingers, from session to session, depending on who was available, but such men as Freddy Gardner and Frank Weir, the latter well known as a bandleader in the Astor Club, were used on different occasions.

Even Billy Mayerl directed a dance band for a time in 1937; I say "even" because, although he had become famous as one of the original Savoy Havana Band pianists, he had abandoned dance music – apart from teaching the technique of dance-band piano playing – and gone into variety as the partner of Gwen Farrar, whose masculine voice made their duets sound like two men. When this partnership broke up, and Gwen Farrar was reunited with Norah Blaney, her original workmate, Billy Mayerl continued as a solo act. His compositions, while hardly in the dance music idiom, are well known as light novelty pieces in the *Zee Confrey-Kitten On The Keys* style (*Marigold, Hollyhock, Jasmine, and Eskimo Skivers* are among them).

We also had several Commonwealth visitors during the late 'thirties who added to the night-life of London to a greater or lesser extent. Billy Bisset was a Canadian whose band played at the Savoy in 1936 and 1937, and Brian Lawrence, an Australian violinist





and vocalist, was very successful, first at Quaglin's Restaurant and afterwards at Lansdowne House. The Quaglin band was a five-piece unit that used no brass, but offered interesting "hot" music of an unusual quality and sound. Lawrence was no Venuti, but his little band had something of the genuine Joe Venuti Blue Four sound. (Venuti had used Adrian Rollini on bass saxophone amongst other instruments; Lawrence featured a baritone sax, and both had piano and guitar in support, but Lawrence had a piano-accordion and bass. Later, he worked with a much larger, more conventional and generally less outstanding orchestra.)

Joe Venuti had appeared at the London Palladium as a solo act in the autumn of 1934, and the supporting band was led by another Canadian, Teddy Joyce. He was a good all-round clarinet, saxophone and violin player, who had studied music in Toronto and Detroit, worked with Rudy Vallee and the Dorsey Brothers before coming to England early in 1934. He became Master of Ceremonies at the Kit-Cat Club, afterwards forming his own band of top-line musicians that played at the Dorchester to give Jack Jackson and his orchestra a holiday. He later built a new band and opened his own club, the Continental, but it does not seem to have been a great success, and Joyce slipped into obscurity. He is believed to have died sometime in the 'fifties.

One of the best remembered of the Commonwealth artists who entertained London with a band is the West Indian negro Ken "Snakehips" Johnson. He arrived in 1936 with his all-negro band, which he augmented with a few local white musicians, and which played principally at the Old Florida Club; latterly he led a somewhat larger group, based on the original, at the Café de Paris. Edgar Jackson, writing in *The Gramophone* about the band's first records (in 1938, for Decca) commented that he had hitherto pinned his hopes for a British swing band on Eddie Carroll, but that he was inclined to transfer his faith to Ken Johnson.

There was good reason for this decision. Although Eddie Carroll's band was excellent, the coloured musicians brought that extra warmth that musicians of their race have always brought to dance music and jazz. Jackson could not help remarking on what he regarded as crudity – he invariably did so when confronted by a coloured band in those days, even Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson coming in for some distasteful remarks about "nigger jazz" ten years earlier – but the public who liked to listen to good dance music on the radio and records and were more or less oblivious of the finer points of playing took Ken Johnson, his band and his music to their hearts. The fact that Al Bowlly was the featured singer on some of the records in no way injured their sales

potential, even though by now it was April, 1940, the war had begun and was about to erupt in all its viciousness, and people were thinking more of rations than records.

On the night of Saturday, March 8, 1941, the Café de Paris was packed with diners and dancers, most of them in uniform, snatching a few hours' relaxation before returning to their grim tasks. A raid was in progress, but Ken Johnson's band played on. About midnight, a Nazi plane that had evaded the anti-aircraft and Spitfire defences dropped a bomb that shattered the restaurant and killed many of its customers – and in the blast, several members of the band lost their lives, including "Snakehips" himself. A colleague of mine, learning of the tragedy, remarked bitterly, "The only one who was doing something to put a bit of life into British dance music – and they have to — well go and kill him!"

His assessment of the British dance music scene was not quite accurate, of course; no doubt it was charged with emotion at the senselessness of the manner of Johnson's death, of his musicians and those they were entertaining so cheerfully and harmlessly. As we have seen, Ambrose's band was doing wonderful things with even quite ordinary material just before the war; it had spent the first half of 1938 at the same Café de Paris as was later destroyed. That summer, the last one of complete peace, as far as England was concerned, until 1946, Ambrose and his Orchestra was in variety in London, going on tour for the next fifteen months. In the first winter of the war, Ambrose took his band back to the May Fair. Danny Polo, his clarinet and multi-saxophone player, and Joe Brannelly, his guitarist, both Americans, had long since left and gone home, Polo to join Jack Teagarden for the next two years, and Claude Thornhill (once Ray Noble's American pianist in New York) until Polo died suddenly in 1949; Brannelly eventually returned and lived in England for many years.

Thornhill was an arranger very much of the modern school. His work is not as well known in this country as it deserves to be, for it was tasteful, and though forward-looking did not rely on shock tactics to get its meaning across. One of his most charming pieces is *Snowfall*, which although recorded by his band in 1941, did not reach these shores as a commercial issue until 1949. Claude Thornhill also had a delightful number in *Autumn Nocturne*, another 1941 work, and something that by its title and style recalled Raymond Scott, called *Portrait Of A Guinea Farm*. He also included in his orchestra's repertoire arrangements in dance tempo of popular classics such as Brahms' famous *Hungarian Dance No. 5* and Schumann's *Träumerei*.

Arrangements of the classics for dancing had been in vogue at different times throughout the years we have been recalling. As early as 1920 Paul Whiteman had made a one-step out of Ponchielli's *Dance Of The Hours*, and a year later had turned his attention to Rimsky-Korsakov's *Song Of The Indian Guest* from the

opera *Sadko*. Ferdie Grofé arranged both these, calling the latter simply *Song Of India*, an idea revived in 1937 by Tommy Dorsey, using the same melody in a completely different arrangement. Through the years Whiteman made dance tunes out of all kinds of standard classics, from an aria out of Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* to Liszt's best-known *Liebestraum*. "Jazzing the classics" as the procedure became known sometimes went on under entirely different titles, often with lyrics of the usual Tin Pan Alley type. Hence, the 1927 song hit *One Summer Night* was lifted straight from Dvořák's *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, and the same composer's famous *Humoresque* was the raw material for another hit the previous year called *I'd Climb The Highest Mountain*. Even a composer of the stature of Jerome Kern was not averse to taking the above-mentioned *Träumerei* and skilfully rearranging it to form the basis of *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*. Tchaikovsky and Chopin came in for plagiarism of their melodies more than any composers; a list of all the dance numbers that really became hits at the expense of these geniuses would be tedious, but as the war clouds gathered, a ballad that even the great John McCormack recorded as *So Deep Is The Night* soared to public acceptance and enduring popularity on the melody created by Chopin as *Étude, Op 10 No 3 in E major*, and a year later, Tchaikovsky's *Quartet No 1 in D major, Op 11* had its *andante cantabile* turned into a dance tune called *On The Isle Of May*.

Claude Thornhill was no plagiarist where his own compositions were concerned, however; and like Paul Whiteman's, his dance arrangements of the classics were given full credit where it was due for their composition. He probably learned something, perhaps much, from working for Ray Noble for a year or so. The first American band led by Britain's foremost arranger also included Glenn Miller, already established as an arranger in his own right for many years. As far back as 1928 he regularly supplied Sam Lanin with excellent scores, and as already noted, he wrote for the Dorsey Brothers (one of the most effective of these was *Spell Of The Blues*, with its vocal – including the verse! – by Bing Crosby, and the eerie, distant muted brass work behind Jimmy Dorsey's solo).

Glenn Miller was a quiet, reserved man, with no outstanding sense of humour; yet somehow he was induced into recording a vocal on the Dorsey Brothers' record of *Annie's Cousin Fanny* that ended with the extraordinary comment, "You'll never see a Fanny half as pretty as mine!" Whether Miller's sense of humour was deeper than was generally obvious, or whether he could not see why such a line was hilarious, is something we may never know; but he was a first-class arranger, a good straight man on trombone, and sometimes could produce "hot" solo work that led some authorities to believe it was played by no less an artist than Miff Mole.

Born in Iowa in 1904, Glenn Miller had his first experience of first-class professional dance music when

he joined Ben Pollack's Californians in 1926 in Chicago. When Pollack moved to New York, Miller got married and left the band, preferring to free-lance, though he worked fairly regularly with Red Nichols for a time. He formed his first regular band on leaving Ray Noble in 1936, and according to the story of his life as portrayed by Hollywood in a posthumous tribute to him in 1953, he evolved his famous clarinet-above-the-sax-section trade-mark when one of his trumpet players split his lip badly at a rehearsal one day; Miller substituted the "new sound" for the trumpet solo. (Recordings show evidence, however, of this device having been experimented with in 1930 in some of the scores Miller wrote for Sam Lanin.)

To the crowds who bought dance records, tuned in to their radio stations or went to hear the name bands in person and dance to their music, this first band of Glenn Miller's was just another. It lasted from January to August, 1937, the last three months of that period being spent in New Orleans. Miller disbanded, but re-formed his orchestra in March, 1938 and gradually became better and better known. The crowds realized this was not just another band. It had an unmistakable sound with which it could be identified. Glenn Miller landed a recording contract and the resulting discs began to move over the counters of American stores as fast as they could be pressed as youngsters – not then subjected to the indignity of segregation as "teenagers" or "bobby-soxers" – flocked to buy them. They cost 35 cents each; most of the other "swing" idols made records costing more than double, at 75 cents.

Coincidentally with the first of the new Glenn Miller recordings in America came the event known to history as "the Munich crisis." Adolf Hitler, having seized control of Austria in March, 1938, now turned his attention towards Czechoslovakia. Claiming that the Sudeten German minority within the Czech borders were being subjected to "atrocities" by the authorities, he demanded that the territory concerned be ceded forthwith to Germany. Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, flew three times in all to Germany in an attempt to persuade the arrogant dictator not to do anything that would precipitate a second world war, after a speech of particular violence from Hitler had suggested that an invasion of the Sudetenland was imminent. Having agreed to certain concessions, Chamberlain then found that the voracious appetite of the Nazi leader was still unappeased; in conference with the French Prime Minister, M. Daladier, and Il Duce, Benito Mussolini, in Munich on September 29, 1938, the four leaders worked out a plan that gave Hitler all he wanted without war – for the time being. Within six months, the Treaty of Munich was in shreds as the Nazi storm-troopers marched into Prague.

Britain realized that Poland would be next on the list, as Hitler announced that the question of the Free City of Danzig and the strip of land known as the



Major Glenn Miller conducts the AEF Orchestra at a recording session in London on September 16, 1944. [EMI]

Polish Corridor that ran through Germany and gave Poland access to the Baltic must be solved. A treaty of mutual aid in the event of aggression was signed between Britain, France and Poland on the last day of March, 1939. War was as good as declared from that moment on; it was obvious that Hitler would not be deterred by scraps of paper and was not frightened of frail, elderly gentlemen carrying umbrellas and quoting bits of Shakespeare as Neville Chamberlain had done the previous September. Since the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, who had been German Ambassador in London three years earlier, had repeatedly assured his Führer (Leader) that Britain would not fight and would not honour her obligations to Poland, the collision course was set.

All this seemed a long way away to Americans, who could still thank God in all reverence for the Atlantic Ocean. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the third year of his second term of office, welcomed representatives of all nations (except Nazi Germany) to the New York World Fair that April. Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth crossed the Atlantic on what was to be their last major tour for several years. Americans joked that if they could be allowed to keep such a gracious couple in America, the enormous debt owed by Britain since World War I could be overlooked and wiped out. That April, Mussolini seized Albania. Britain announced the introduction of a measure that had seemed as unthinkable as war itself only a few brief years before: compulsory military service in peacetime.

In peacetime? It was peace in the sense that Britain and Germany were still represented officially in each other's capitals; otherwise it was a mockery of all that millions of men had died for a matter of just over twenty years before. Gas-masks had been issued to most of the population of Britain the previous September, and the letters ARP - Air Raid Precautions - began to be as well known, along with all that they signified, as the BBC, GPO and YMCA.

The sale of records of dance music in England began to decline as the tension mounted; only the outstanding top hits were bought in large numbers. Novelty tunes such as the new song with the strong Victorian flavour, *Booms-a-Daisy*, were much in demand, and the cheery, cheeky Cockney song *The Lambeth Walk* ("Oi!") that had been a feature of a Lupino Lane musical comedy from the opening night at the end of 1937 was still doing good business. The first full-length Walt Disney cartoon, *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs*, had gone on general release in London's suburban cinemas the week before the meeting in Munich, a perfect escape-route, if only for a few hours, from the disaster that seemed so imminent outside.

A British song by the prolific composer Jimmy Kennedy struck a pleasantly escapist note that last peace-time summer. It was called *South Of The Border* (*Down Mexico Way*), and Mexico, even farther away

from Europe than the USA, seemed a desirable place to be, notwithstanding the presence there of Leon Trotsky, the exiled co-founder of the Communist movement in Russia. (He was murdered there the following year.) A rousing song that summer that seemed as tailored for armies to sing on the march as *Tipperary* had exactly a quarter of a century earlier was not as native to the British Isles as that world-beater had been, however. Ironically it was written by a Czech named Vejvoda, and it reached England via Germany. The official English title was *The Beer Barrel Polka*, but it was known throughout the land by the first line, *Roll Out The Barrel*.

Twice in the first two weeks of that April, Glenn Miller and his Orchestra visited the recording studio in New York, in the course of which two instrumental numbers were made. One was *Swanee Serenade*, composed by pianist Frankie Carle, the other *Moonlight Serenade*, composed originally as an exercise by Glenn Miller himself. Frankie Carle's pretty little tune was anyone's; Hal Kemp made a most attractive record of it, with muted brasses playing "wah-wah" phrases that to a child of seven who heard it that year, suggested the sun rising and saying "Peep-bo!" (Years later, I married her, and so acquired the record, long after it had been withdrawn and forgotten by most people; the other side immortalized the American President in a song called *Franklin D. Roosevelt Jones*.)

Moonlight Serenade was Glenn Miller's, and only Glenn Miller's. To be sure, other bands have played it and recorded it, but it remains forever the epitome of the sound that made the Glenn Miller band famous throughout the civilized world. For it was a civilized sound; and the number is a melodic, simply-constructed tune, as evocative of its title as Debussy's *Clair de Lune* or the famous movement from Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. The two serenades on one record reached England and the record shops in August, 1939. Before that month was out, Hitler of Germany had brought off the diplomatic coup of the decade by signing a treaty of non-aggression with his arch-enemy Stalin of Russia. The last obstacle to his designs on Poland thus removed, the preparations for the inevitable conflict were put into final order. Although the date fixed for the slaughter of Poland to begin was August 25, Hitler went through the motions of appearing to listen to any peace proposals that would give him what he wanted. Eventually, his patience exhausted, as he said, he gave the order for his Panzer divisions, supported by the unconquered (and, he believed, unconquerable) Luftwaffe, to advance into Poland at dawn on September 1. Britain and France issued ultimatums in a forlorn last effort to persuade the paranoid little ex-corporal to stop his mad plans, and when these were ignored as was expected, the balloons went up, quite literally, and *Moonlight Serenade* began to have a more sinister meaning than ever its composer could have dreamed.

Moonlight serenade

On a sunny September morning, as good people throughout the land were going to church, Neville Chamberlain announced that once again Great Britain was at war with Germany. His hopes for peace, so buoyantly expressed as he stepped off the 'plane at Heston Airport just eleven months earlier, lay shattered and dead. A little over a year later, Chamberlain the Peacemaker himself was dead as German bombers rained death and destruction on London. It was a broken heart that killed Chamberlain, though. His announcement to the world that, in effect, the Armistice of 1918 had only been that, a lull in hostilities for slightly under twenty-one years, was followed by the eerie wail of the air-raid siren. For the next eleven months, it was rarely heard; then after France, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg followed Poland, Norway and Denmark under the Nazi heel, and Chamberlain's able successor Winston Churchill warned the nation in his famous "blood, toil, tears and sweat" speech about what they could expect, the undulating moan became London's moonlight serenade for nights, weeks, months on end, not to mention the daylight raids that cost "Slap-Happy Herman" Goering's proud Luftwaffe so dearly.

At the outset of the war, of course, all the popular songs other than those of American origin were concerned with the conflict. The hastily-trained troops, barely out of school, assured one and all they were going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line, Hitler's vaunted defence, in much the same spirit of braggadocio as their fathers had sung about winding up the watch on the Rhine twenty-five years before. They rolled out the barrel, of course, and sang all sorts of rude songs about Hitler, parodizing one British song that had been composed just prior to the outbreak of hostilities and was thus not concerned with them: *Run, Rabbit, Run*. Jack Hylton recorded this with the irrepressible comedian Arthur Askey singing the words as written, then with the parody chorus ("Run, Adolf, run, Adolf, run, run, run; look what you've been gorn an' done, done, done").

The immediate effect of the outbreak of war on British dance bands was almost disastrous. Musicians



Harry Parry.

[EMI]

were not regarded as being in an occupation of national importance, and were thus as liable to call-up as anyone else not obviously and directly concerned with waging war. To be sure, several had medical histories that precluded military training, but a number of bands found their ranks thinning almost visibly. Like other captains of industry, however, the leaders determined to carry on with their obviously important task of maintaining the national morale as best they could.

One of the finest bands ever to play in England was formed from front-rank musicians who had volunteered together in an effort to help as servicemen and perhaps maintain their musical standards at the same time by playing whenever possible to their fellow fighting-men and civilians too. Four of them were from Ambrose's band at the May Fair; two from Lew Stone, and the others from various bands throughout London. They were called the RAF Dance Orchestra, or "The Squadronairs," and were originally directed by Sgt Leslie Holmes, but after a while, the direction passed to one of the pianists, Jimmie Miller, who also provided several vocals. The sound of the band was warm-toned but clean; service life had not had a damaging effect on the "swing" aspect of any of the members' playing, and so popular were they that for several years after the war was over, they continued to play as The Squadronairs.

There were other service bands besides. The dance band of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, the Blue Rockets, directed by Eric Tann, once a trombonist with Ambrose, was a splendid unit, and there was a band formed at No 1 Balloon Centre, under the direction of trombonist Cpl Paul Fenoulhet! All these provided dance music of a very high order. There was even a dance-band section of the Band of HM Welsh Guards!

Although many of these bands played and recorded without vocalists, the "civvy" handleaders began to find the demand for singers in front of their orchestras was increasing. Arrangements had to leave so much room for the vocal parts that they frequently occupied two-thirds or more of the playing time of a three-minute record, and although there had been occasions in the past when a singer of the calibre of Al Bowlly would get label credit (and if the leader himself, such as Jack Hylton or Jack Payne sang, they would be mentioned on the record label in this capacity), it was not a general rule to name the singers. Then the shroud of anonymity dropped away, and we began to be aware of names such as Chick Henderson, Bob Arden, Betty Kent, Julie Dawn . . . and the voice that purred the lyrics on a handful of Tommy Dorsey records issued in England from masters made in America became identified as Frank Sinatra. For all the notice most people took, the "vocal refrain" legend might as well have remained in that form.

With so many musicians conscripted along with everyone else who could not provide satisfactory reasons for not being called up, the size of the bands in some clubs necessarily shrank. (As we have noticed earlier, Jack Hylton disbanded completely, and some others such as Jack Payne retired from the band-leading business for a time.) The band at Le Suivi, a new and intimate night-club, was a Dixieland unit directed by Sid Phillips. Always a keen supporter of the idiom, Sid Phillips has never lost faith in its power to entertain and provide music for dancing, and when in 1949 he began a series of recordings for HMV that

continued for a twelve-year period, he mixed his repertoire to include as many of the "good old good ones" (to use Louis Armstrong's term for them) as he could – and the customers lapped them up! He gave the current "pops" the same kind of treatment, and from being just dance tunes, they came alive. One might switch the metaphor and say Sid Phillips cooked the ingredients and served them up appetizingly, not so piping hot that no one could touch them, but agreeably for all tastes.

While Sid Phillips called on the older style to give space to the new, a young Welsh clarinetist named Harry Parry had a great deal of success with his Radio Rhythm Club Sextet. It was the resident unit that played on the BBC programme so-named, and it was purely a carbon copy of the latest Benny Goodman small band. Goodman, having found out all he could about what his Trio and Quartet could do, now added guitar and bass to the clarinet, piano, drums and vibraphone of the Quartet to make a Sextet, and this instrumentation was used by Harry Parry for his group. Benny Goodman created something of a sensation among the connoisseurs when he signed on "Cootie" Williams, Duke Ellington's "hot" trumpet player since 1929, to be featured with the full band and with the Sextet also; this was in November, 1940, and at the same time, the vibraphone was dropped and a tenor saxophone brought in, so that the band was now seven strong – and styled "Benny Goodman and his Sextet." Later still, the Sextet consisted of Goodman, the usual four rhythm, and a trombone. This was little more than an up-dated instrumentation for the Louisiana Five of just over twenty years before, and although the sound was pleasant and unusual, the absence of a first-class trumpet tended to reduce some of the tonal brilliance.

Harry Parry followed the Goodman lead as far as the trumpet-clarinet-tenor sax-rhythm format, and never used a trombone. Had there never been a Goodman Sextet of these ingredients, Harry Parry might have earned himself a higher regard among the connoisseurs of the best in rhythmic music, but it seemed that with Goodman and Parry in the same line of business, recording on the same label (Parlophone in England) and even using to some extent the same repertoire, the Radio Rhythm Club Sextet was *de trop* – especially when records, like everything else, were "rationed" in that there was a limit to what could be produced in any one field of music. Nevertheless, the Parry records sold to their own public, which if lacking the discriminating taste of the true enthusiasts of rhythmic music (it was beginning to be rather *démoté* to call it "swing") were happy to buy the home-grown product.

The Radio Rhythm Club Sextet had at the outset one precious advantage in its pianist, a Londoner named George Shearing, blind almost from his birth in 1919. He had gained quite a name for himself as a musician of outstanding talent in the Rhythm Clubs



The Quintet of the Hot Club of France (1934). Django Reinhardt (guitar) facing right.

of the West End before the war, and his work with Parry's group brought him to the notice of a much wider public. Later he formed his own group, and after the war, was invited to America where he has remained ever since, playing cocktail-lounge music with a rhythm section, earning a well-deserved reward by adapting popular standards, new ballads and original compositions to the sleek, self-effacing style he made his own.

Harry Parry did make one excursion into Dixieland some years after the war when he used a traditional instrumentation for playing Harry Roy's old signature tune *Bygones Call Rag*; although it was done as a leg-pull at the expense of the old style, in fact it turned out very well. Both he and Shearing took part in a much-publicized event in the HMV studios in St. John's Wood, London, one wet Sunday afternoon in November, 1941. It was the occasion of the first English public jam session recording, when three bands, composed of leading West End dance-band musicians divided into octets of identical instrumentation played all the threadbare old standards for several hours in the presence of an appreciative but hardly very discerning audience.

Another very popular small band in the early days

of the war was the group resident at Hatchett's Restaurant. It featured the "hot" violin playing of Stephane Grappelly as its principal attraction for the initiated, and in support there were two musicians who had worked together in happier times in Jack Hylton's band: Arthur Young at the piano, doubling a kind of electric organ called the Novachord, and "Chappie" d'Amato, playing guitar. The vocalist was an attractive girl named Beryl Davies who afterwards emigrated to America and sang there very successfully for a number of years.

Stephane Grappelly's career goes back to the late 'twenties, when he became well known in his native France for his "hot" violin playing with various orchestras, notably Orlando's Tango Orchestra and Grégoire's Orchestra. In 1934, he and the Belgian gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt formed the Quintette of the Hot Club of France, which made several very successful variety-stage appearances and recordings in London before the war. In fact, the Quintette was in London right up to the week before the outbreak of hostilities; all but Grappelly managed to get home to France, and as his homeland was enemy-occupied territory from the summer of 1940 onwards, Grappelly had no choice but to stay in England. Django Reinhardt continued to play in Occupied France and Belgium, even recording old standards under new titles (*Dinah* became *Dinette*, for example),

and was only reunited with Grappelly in 1945 when the war was over. The Quintette was re-formed, and Django even went to America and appeared with Duke Ellington. He was taken ill suddenly in the spring of 1953 and died. Grappelly plays yet, as well as ever.

The American visitors had gone home, and Brian Lawrence returned to Australia, never to attempt a come-back in British dance-band circles. Spencer Williams, a negro pianist and composer from New Orleans, resident in England for many years, continued to live in blitzed Southern England until not long before his death in America in 1965. He supplied Joe Daniels with a constant stream of new numbers for the Hot Shots to play, but none of them enjoyed the everlasting success of his *Royal Garden Blues* and *Basin Street Blues*. Carroll Gibbons continued to direct the music at the Savoy Hotel; he was as much a fixture in London night-life as the Savoy itself, and endeared himself to all who listened to his comforting music by his quiet, pleasant manner. Geraldo also had a band at the Savoy for a time early in the war.

Dancing itself had undergone some changes in the preceding few years. The "swing" craze produced the phenomenon known as "jitterbug," a noisy extrovert dance that involved acrobatics far more exuberant than the Charleston at its wildest. The elders tut-tutted and condemned modern youth accordingly of course, but were probably agreeably surprised (even if they did not always admit it) to find that the same young people were also getting fun out of formation dances such as the Palais Glide (which recalled the style of days gone by), though there was also the wiggling conga from Latin America, which did not. Edmundo Ros and Don Marino Barreto each gave authentic dance music to which this and other exotic dances could be performed, Ros in particular being a long-standing favourite with the British public; he directs a band playing this kind of music to this day.

In America, Latin music retained as much of its popularity as ever, principally owing to the efforts of Xavier Cugat and his Waldorf-Astoria Dance Orchestra. His records were often made without vocals, but when a singer was present, it was usually a girl with a seductive voice and magnetic personality named Dinah Shore. She also appeared as "Made-moiselle" Dinah Shore on a rather pretentious NBC radio programme that featured what was called the Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street. Henry Levine, an American trumpeter who had worked in London with Ambrose for six months in 1927 from the night the May Fair Hotel opened, was in charge of the music; he was known for the purpose as "Dr" Henry Levine, and his colleague Paul Laval was dignified with the title "Maestro." Jazz soprano saxophonist Sidney Bechet, making a guest appearance, was introduced as "Professor."

Desi Arnaz was another very popular bandleader working in the Latin idiom in New York during the

early 'forties. He had his wife, who at that time was Lucille Ball, the comedienne film actress, sing some of the vocal work, but she never meant much in this capacity. A girl singer who made a much greater impression both as a singer and as a light comedienne (and sometimes as a straight actress) was a teenager fresh from school, singing with Les Brown's orchestra. She was Doris Kappelhoff, better known as Doris Day. At sixteen, she was recording, making radio and stage appearances, and being groomed for stardom; while in London, another girl of the same age and vocally similar talent, Anne Shelton, was also on the way to stardom with Ambrose's orchestra. Ambrose had been featuring London-born Vera Lynn with enormous success; she had gone solo on the variety circuits and was already known as "The Sweetheart of the Forces."

Benny Goodman too featured one of the most universally popular in a long line of girl singers who had worked with him since his setting out on his own in 1935. This was Peggy Lee, blonde and beautiful, extremely personable and with a creamy voice that put every shade of meaning into whatever she sang, be it blues, ballads or light-hearted nonsense. Goodman, in the years before the war, had featured not only his glamorous girl singers and his vivacious drummer Gene Krupa, but also a brilliant trumpet showman named Harry James. While still in his very early twenties, James had added a lustre to the Goodman brass section that put it right ahead so far as the public estimation was concerned (some experts found his work far too flashy to be compatible with good taste), but there is no doubt that, given the right conditions and suitable numbers, Harry James could and often did outplay most of his contemporaries.

He created some truly beautiful music as a member of a quartet that included Teddy Wilson, the great pianist from the Goodman Trio and Quartet, and Kenneth "Red" Norvo, the only xylophonist to make a big name for himself in American dance music. *Blue Mood* has the sublimity of a serious string quartet composition, serene, melodic, perfectly balanced. (It is also the final answer to those who believe that jazz, swing, "hot" music, call it what you will, is all a matter of over-blowing, ugly noise. That kind of music certainly exists in the name of "le hot," but it is on the debit side of the ledger; *Blue Mood* is definitely in credit.)

That was in 1937; a matter of some eighteen months later, Harry James recorded with another very unusual and entirely different trio. It consisted of one or other of two negro pianists from Chicago (Pete Johnson or Albert Ammons) and a negro bass and drums, and the idiom in which they played bore the rather unedifying but catchy name of "boogie-woogie." Whereas ragtime, jazz and the straight dance music derived from them relied on a steady four beats in a bar, sometimes with every other beat heavily accented, sometimes with all four stressed equally, boogie-woogie (or boogie as it became known for



Above: Harry James.

(EMI)

Right: Mildred Bailey and husband "Red" Norvo. (Rex Harris)



short) employed a bass of eight beats to a bar. It was said to have been suggested many years before by the pistons of American locomotives, and as many negro self-taught pianists worked to earn a living in some humble capacity on the railroads, they adopted the insistent beat that was all around them as a firm foundation for the music they played for self-amusement, for that of their friends, or for supplementing their meagre incomes in after-work hours in saloons and dives. Ammons and Johnson were two of the best-known exponents of the style; it had been passed on by another master of the art, one "Pine Top" Smith, shot in a saloon brawl by accident at the age of twenty-five in 1929. *Pine Top's Boogie Woogie*, complete with spoken directions to the dancers, has been a posthumous tribute to the primitive but fascinating art that during the war spread suddenly and rapidly throughout the USA and across to war-torn Britain.

It could be that Harry James's espousal of this form helped to spread its popularity; but he was not one to remain in a small corner of the music field. He had left Benny Goodman about the time he teamed up on record with the boogie woogie masters, and within a few weeks had formed his own band, which was an enormous success. His vocalist during the first summer of its existence (1939) was twenty-four-year-old Frank Sinatra, who joined Tommy Dorsey early in 1940; his records with James were not sensational sellers, and are extremely rare today except as reissues. It was not the voice of the young Frank Sinatra that put Harry James's band on the map, but a series of recordings that were no more than showcases for the extraordinary demonstrations of trumpet-playing of the leader. Such titles as *Trumpet Blues* and *Cantabile*, the two-part *Trumpet Rhapsody*, and special arrange-

ments of Benedict's *Carnival Of Venice* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight Of The Bumble-Bee* were huge successes at the time (1941-1942) and continued to sell prodigiously over the next ten years or more. They were hardly in the best of taste, and in view of the excellence of *Blue Mood* five years earlier, they were regarded by most critics as deplorable, but the American and the British public alike snapped them up as fast as the presses could produce them. By the summer of 1942, Harry James had a band that came close to resembling that of Paul Whiteman in his late-twenties heyday, in that he had four trumpets (including himself), three trombones, a french horn, four saxophones, six violins, two violas, 'cello and four rhythm. At this time, even Tommy Dorsey had four trumpets, four trombones (including himself), five saxophones, seven violins, 'cello, harp and four rhythm. The clean-cut, easily-swinging lines of the earlier mid-thirties Tommy Dorsey orchestra (in this writer's opinion perhaps the greatest of them all) became blurred over to some extent, though the inclusion of a harp in the instrumentation is interesting.

The musician responsible for this stranger to the dance music world was a girl named Ruth Hill. Yet was the harp such a stranger? In Fred Elizalde's orchestra, and in Jay Whidden's before him, an Italian expatriate named Mario Lorenzi had shown how well the harp can fit into a dance band, and give a touch of extra colour and originality, qualities sadly lacking in the best bands on occasion. In the mid-thirties, Lorenzi had his own small group called his Rhythmics, and it produced a more danceable impulse than many of its larger contemporaries. In New York in 1934, a studio band under the nominal leadership of Jack Teagarden (with Benny Goodman on clarinet) produced a solitary side for Brunswick Records, called *Just Men*. The focal point of this performance is neither Teagarden's short trombone solo nor Goodman's much longer one on clarinet, but

the contribution made by the only harpist in the States ever to make the instrument "swing." He was the late Casper Reardon, who in his life of just a month short of thirty-four years played with the Philadelphia and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestras, with Paul Whiteman, Abe Lyman, the Casa Loma Orchestra and other groups including his own. His work on *Junk Man* is quite beyond mere words of praise; if he had not been present, it would be an exceptionally pleasant record, but as it is, the flowing lines of the melody, skilfully and tastefully decorated by the master harpist, make it quite outstanding. In the writer's estimation, it stands as one of the five or six greatest records of the decade, perhaps the greatest. It is true that in 1928, a quartet of trombone, piano, pipe-organ and harp had recorded one side for Victor under the direction of Nat Shilkret, but the organist was "Fats" Waller, and the harpist, Francis J. Lapitino of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, can barely be heard; and in 1940, there was a string group called the New Friends of Rhythm that played rhythmic versions of snatches of classical melody under smart titles (*Barber's Hiltch* for something out of Rossini's opera *The Barber Of Seville*, *Capriciousness No 24*, a long way after Paganini, *Shoot The Schubert To Me, Hubert* - and so on) and this also used a harp, but neither group begins to compare with the superlative work on *Junk Man*, which was after all only another popular song of the time.

The United States introduced a measure of peace-time conscription in the autumn of 1940 as her President signed the Lease-Lend Agreement with Great Britain. A little over a year later came the shock of the surprise Japanese attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, precipitating the USA into the war. As with British musicians two or three years earlier, so now American bands began to be caught in the draft. The best-known service band was led by Major Glenn Miller, who had volunteered for the Army in the late summer of 1942. By then, the only records being made by instrumentalists were the government-issue "V" Discs, twelve-inch 78 rpm records usually pressed in a new compound of light, but tough plastic called vinylite, frequently with as many as four or even five complete numbers on a single disc. Commercial records were prohibited by the decision of the American Federation of Musicians, whose leader, James Caesar Petrillo, had become acutely aware of the extensive use of records instead of live performers by radio stations. He therefore introduced a measure to prohibit the making of further instrumental recordings by union members unless for use only in the war effort and domestically. Since no one could control the use of any record once it had been purchased, the second part of this proviso meant that commercial recording was to stop on and after the date specified by the union: at midnight on July 31, 1942 the recording studios were silenced, apart from unaccompanied vocal recordings by such

as Bing Crosby, Dinah Shore, Frank Sinatra, Dick Haymes and others. (Negro spiritual groups had rarely used instrumental accompaniments, so they continued as before.) When the carefully accumulated stockpiles of classical records ran out for the major companies, Victor and Columbia, in 1944, they reluctantly agreed to do as Decca, with little pretension to any classical catalogue, had done a year earlier, and sign an agreement with the unions to pay a royalty to union funds for the relief of unemployed musicians.

Since "V" Discs were created expressly to bolster the morale of the American fighting-man, however, they were exempt from Petrillo's decree, and nearly nine hundred different ones were made and issued between 1943 and 1948. They included music in all categories, such classifications being stated on the labels, sometimes with curious results. "Sweet," "Hot Jazz," "Swing," "Dixieland," "Popular Vocal," "Instrumental," and so on were terms applied without a great deal of discrimination in some cases, but the main point was that the music was there, and the American forces personnel grabbed them as soon as they were issued (free, of course). It must be remarked that it did not take some of the legitimate recipients long to discover that they possessed some highly desirable international currency, and British record collectors, be they of jazz, dance music, popular vocals or any other category, were willing to pay heavily to possess copies of these most exclusive of all recordings. The fact that many of the performances were unobtainable elsewhere, having been made expressly and without fees for the "V" Disc label made them doubly, trebly desirable, and even some of the titles that had been simply transferred from existing commercial issues were prefaced by spoken remarks from the artists, which was almost like having the labels autographed by those artists.

Major Glenn Miller's large AEF Band made a number of these records. Before joining the Army, he and his civilian band had made two films (*Sun Valley Serenade* and *Orchestra Wives*) and his commercial records were enjoying fantastic sales on both sides of the Atlantic. They were not by any means all in the "swing" idiom; the most popular during the early 'forties was admittedly a non-vocal piece called *In The Mood* with a catchy if repetitive tune (it had been recorded in 1930 as *Tar Paper Stomp* and sold 68 copies throughout the States, and again in 1932 as *Hot And Anxious*, for which the sales figures are not available but though considerably better than this, were still not world-shattering), and there were things such as *Sold American* and *Pennsylvania Six-Five Thousand* whose only vocal part was provided by the band chanting the titles at intervals, but there were also dozens of regular numbers from films and Tin Pan Alley, mostly modern, but sometimes almost ancient. The latter included *Alice Blue Gown* (1920), *Wonderful One* (1923), *Beautiful Ohio* and *Missouri* (both 1918),

My Blue Heaven (1927) and *Farewell Blues* (1922), and not one featured a vocal. The first four, moreover, were written as waltzes, and Glenn Miller respected the composer's intentions in every case and arranged them for his fine orchestra – as waltzes. There was plenty of sugar here, certainly, but it was tasty sugar, not saccharin or treacle.

The policy of first-class listenable dance music that Glenn Miller had pursued as leader of a civilian band was maintained during his Army career. One of his most famous recordings for "V" Discs was a march version of the old jazz standard, *St. Louis Blues*, and he remade several of his earlier commercial successes. In the summer of 1944, as the Allied armies swarmed across the Channel into France to avenge the slaughter of countless innocents during the previous five years, Major Glenn Miller and his band were posted to England by Supreme Command. It was the "buzz-bomb" summer, and daylight raids by flying-bombs were frequent. The Miller band fulfilled its commitments as efficiently as any other servicemen, and Dinah Shore was there to sing numbers like *Long Ago And Far Away*, *Stardust* and *I've Got A Heart Filled With Love*. There was a recording session in the HMV studios on September 16, 1944, but the results were never issued. There seems to have been a second session which produced a somewhat extended version of *In The Mood*, still a *sine qua non* of the Miller repertoire after five years, on a single-sided twelve-inch record privately pressed. There were broadcasts which the BBC recorded. None of this music has been heard by the public since.

In December, 1944, Major Glenn Miller and the AEF Band were posted to Paris. It was the first Christmas after the liberation. On the morning of Friday, December 15, Miller took off in a single-engined 'plane from Cardington, near Bedford, into a fog, to precede his band in the French capital. Nothing more was ever heard or seen of Glenn Miller or his 'plane.

The band went to Paris and played the engagements that had been arranged for it, hoping against fading hope that somehow, someday, its leader would reappear. A year later, the American military authorities declared that he was officially dead.

Glenn Miller, the quiet, almost dour musician, most unspectacular and undramatic of personalities, had disappeared in a manner that contrasted so sharply with his character and demeanour as to provide a natural story for a movie. Hence *The Glenn Miller Story*, with James Stewart in the title-role, looking uncannily like the maestro himself, carefully coached in the trombone slide positions by Joe Yuki, late of Jimmy Dorsey's orchestra, who "ghosted" the sound of "Miller's" horn in the film itself. It was Glenn Miller's custom to study his own performances carefully by having them recorded at the time of his broadcasts, so that any little points that he considered needed improving could be noted at leisure. These were on large discs made of glass coated with cellulose



Glenn Miller (1938).

[EMI

acetate, and over the years before he joined the US Army, they amounted to several hundred. They were stacked away during his war service and after his disappearance, until his lawyer came across them and decided that some might be suitable for commercial release. This was arranged and the original discs were cleaned up electronically by RCA Victor and issued in a series of LP records more than twenty years after Miller's death – and they proceeded to offer sales competition with the "groups" beloved of the teenagers of the 'sixties, whose parents were barely old enough to remember Glenn Miller in his heyday. A Glenn Miller Appreciation Society was formed in England, and throughout the world his records are still collected and treasured.

The war ended a few months after Glenn Miller vanished, a few days after the death of President Roosevelt. Three months after Germany collapsed, two atomic bombs on Japan brought about that country's surrender also. Things would never be quite the same again. "Swing" had had its day, run its course. The top bands had not progressed much in the war years. The two leaders who seemed to be charting a new and acceptable course for dance music were dead: Ken Johnson had been killed in London, and Glenn Miller. . . . Geraldo openly used all the Miller trade-marks in a laudable attempt to keep the tradition alive in England, while Miller's principal



tenor saxophonist and occasional vocalist, Tex Beneke, took over the leadership of the band for a while, recorded the famous *St. Louis Blues March* very successfully, in America. Jerry Gray, one of Miller's arrangers – he used others besides his own, especially at the height of his popularity – formed another band that followed the Miller design. Tommy Dorsey and Harry James dispensed with some of their superfluous strings, while Benny Goodman flirted briefly with a new musical form that had been evolved during the war among negro musicians of the younger generation.

This was "be-bop" or "re-bop," usually called "bop," already referred to in the discussion of Ray Noble's music in Chapter 4. Its principal protagonists in the mid- and late 'forties were trumpeter John "Dizzy" Gillespie and alto saxophonist Charlie "Bird" Parker. The latter has become almost deified by those to whom his peculiarly unmelodic, sour, angular music makes an appeal, particularly so since his death, hastened by drugs, at the age of thirty-four in 1955. Although there were many musicians of both races and from among the older as well as the younger age-groups who embraced the new style, it had very little influence on dance music. Once the war was over, there were few bands that seemed anxious to try anything new that might be more commercially acceptable generally than "bop." Those who were not still playing in the same way as they had for the previous decade were copying Glenn Miller, or were going right back to what were termed "the grass roots" and trying to revive the music of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, or "King" Oliver, or whatever old-time band happened to appeal to their leader. Jimmie Lunceford, "Fats" Waller, "Jelly-Roll" Morton were dead. Paul Whiteman, for so long the leader of fashions in popular dance music, had given up his band to concentrate on his artists' agency business. He would appear for occasional "guest conductor" performances, and did quite a lot of radio and television shows until not long before his death on December 29, 1967. Jean Goldkette had not led a band since the 'twenties. Ted Lewis was still doing his "High-Hatted Tragedian of Jazz" act and amusing new fans while inducing nostalgia in his old followers.

One bandleader who successfully injected the idiom of "bop" into his music was "Woody" Herman. His late-forties-early-fifties bands were a far cry indeed from the "Band That Plays The Blues" of the 'thirties. Joe Bishop and his flugelhorn had gone, and instead there was a brass section that could perform the craziest (dizziest?) acrobatics in the musical stratosphere, anchored, if that is the right word, to a rhythm section dominated by a bass player named "Chubby" Jackson. Successive Herman orchestras were named the Third Herd, Fourth Herd and so on. They were more concert orchestras than dance bands; the late

Igor Stravinsky had written his *Ebony Concerto* for the Herman band of the 'forties, but it did not command the public acclaim that was accorded to George Gershwin's concert pieces written for Paul Whiteman twenty or so years before. Count Basie and Duke Ellington looked shrewdly at the crazy new style, carefully selected such of its elements as they considered suitable for their purpose, and continued to tour the world successfully as concert orchestras. (Several of Duke Ellington's men remained with him for over two decades; his personnel of the 'forties, even of the 'fifties, is quite surprisingly like that of the 'thirties, but his music, while seldom indulging in the wilder aspects of the modern idiom, was always abreast of the times . . . always Ellington. Over the years since the war, Duke has composed works on a larger scale than anything he produced for dancing at the Cotton Club in Harlem: *Black, Brown And Beige*, *Sack Sweet Sorrow* and *In The Beginning, God* . . . are some of the most interesting examples of modern concert music.)

"Bop" was eagerly accepted by many who had little idea of what it was all about, simply because such people are the kind who have to be abreast of fashion, regardless of how ridiculous it may be or may make them appear. Although the new style had little indeed in common with what had preceded it, and its very anarchy deliberately flew in the face of the established order of things in the world of dance music and jazz, its devotees insisted on calling it "modern jazz," despite categorical denials by its High Priest, Charlie Parker himself, that what he played was jazz at all.

As has already been mentioned (in Chapter 3), one new name did appear on the dance-band scene in America after the war, that of Stan Kenton. His vigorous brass and reed sections, imaginative arrangements and sturdy rhythm section made a strong appeal to dancers eager to turn to something new that was at the same time not too flagrantly dissociated from the style that had gone before. Although Kenton played the popular dance tunes of the day, he also offered new works of his own; the famous *Artistry* series are still acceptable today, his *Interlude* is a delightfully pensive little number, and his *Concerto To End All Concertos* displays a certain sense of humour, even of satire. It was as a concert band that the Stan Kenton Orchestra made its greatest success, however, but there was a noticeable difference in the decorum of the audiences of the late 'forties and 'fifties on both sides of the Atlantic, compared with the frenzy with which Benny Goodman's concerts of 1937 and 1938 had been greeted. Those who criticize the younger generation now for their flamboyant methods of self-expression might do well to ponder briefly on the antics of the "jitterbugs" of their own youth.

In England, Ted Heath and his Music gave many highly successful concerts, but relatively few ballroom appearances. The influence of Victor Silvester's



"utility" dance music was everywhere apparent; most small dance halls employed "scratch" bands of semi-professional musicians whose instrumentation followed more or less the simple lines of the strict-dance-tempo groups, even if their tempo was not always as strict as that of the bands they sought to emulate. When rock-'n'-roll burst on the scene in 1956 with the coming of Bill Haley and his Comets, this seemed to most youngsters like the long-awaited New Sound to which they could really dance and work off their perfectly natural, understandably pent-up energies. "Bop" was for the dark-glasses-goatee bear-and-beret brigade to sit and listen to in dim-lit cellars, more than likely in an atmosphere of pot-smoking (even in those days); Stan Kenton and Ted Heath produced exciting sounds, but they were rather advanced for the ordinary teenager to dance to. Bill Haley, his hair carefully cultivated into a "kiss-curl" in the middle of his forehead, his tenor saxophonist lying flat on his back and his rhythm section furiously whacking out a heavily-accented off-beat, was the answer.

Naturally, most parents looked askance at this noisy, rough new sound. It was as impossible to escape the litany of *Rock Around The Clock* in 1956 as it had been to dodge the music going 'round and around just twenty years before. One suburban shop assistant ordered a hundred copies and automatically offered one to each young customer, assuming with absolute accuracy that the record was the reason for the visit to the shop. The whole lot were sold in one day!

Side by side with the coming of "rock" was a recrudescence of the Dixieland style. It was termed "trad" (traditional) and for a few years it inspired the formation in England (and to a lesser extent in America) of a number of small bands based more or less on the Dixieland pattern, but frequently without a piano. Chris Barber the Guildhall School of Music student who became Britain's best-known trombonist led an excellent sextet that played everything from

Above left: Stan Kenton.

Above: Chris Barber.

Right: Humphrey Lyttelton, old Etonian, ex-Guards officer and jazz musician.

[EMI

original ragtime to quite modern instrumentals, some of them his own composition; up from Somerset came Bernard "Acker" Bilk with his clarinet and his Paramount Jazz Band. Terry Lightfoot, Kenny Ball, the Merseyside Jazz Band, all these were cast in much the same mould; the sound was raucous and rough, but that was how the followers seemed to like it. The Original Downtown Syncopators based their music so exactly on that of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band that it was sometimes difficult to distinguish them from each other, and of no other band in history can that be said; but the most original of them all was the band led by ex-Guards officer, old Etonian Humphrey Lyttelton on trumpet. His multi-instrumental ability enabled him to play clarinet duets with Wally Fawkes, better known as "Trog," the cartoonist and creator of the *Daily Mail* strip characters Rufus and Flook, and he once made a record on which, by careful grafting of four performances made separately, he appeared to be a one-man band consisting of trumpet, clarinet, piano and washboard. His regular band was not consciously based on any earlier style in particular, and it had merit in that its repertoire included many original compositions by the leader himself.

These bands enjoyed a considerable vogue through the late 'forties, 'fifties and very early 'sixties. Then came the "groups" with their deliberately scruffy appearances and "earthy" sound that was alleged to stem from the crude negro blues of the rural southern states of America. The smart-looking dance band of yesterday was demodé among the youngsters, who like all of their age-group, wanted to "do their own thing." Unlike their forbears, however, the existence



of a permissive society has allowed them this licence, and so at "pop" festivals, notably in the Isle of Wight at the end of August, 1969, thousands of teenagers participated in a near-ritualistic performance by various "groups" and solo performers, lived rough, mixed-bathed naked and generally proved that they were children of the parents who had in all probability swooned over the young Frank Sinatra when he sang with Tommy Dorsey, or jived and jitterbugged to Benny Goodman's orchestra on records while their American counterparts reacted in the same way to these bands in person. The difference was that the young people of the 'sixties and 'seventies did as they pleased and got away with it, generally; their parents when the same age did not dare and probably would not have got away with it if they had. *Autre temps, autre mœurs* - or are they?

The post-first-war "flappers" and their "knuts" were very much condemned for "jazzing"; their younger sisters and brothers five or six years later came under fire for doing the Charleston and the Black Bottom; composers such as Johann Strauss, Jr not unnaturally but inaccurately forecast a return of the waltz his family had made immortal in the mid-nineteenth century; came swing music and the antics of the jitterbugs, and of course that, and boogie-woogie and rock-'n'-roll and the Twist and so on, were regarded as quite unimaginably dreadful. But those who condemn the latest proof of teenage decadence so harshly - and let it be remarked that the protests against "pops" of the 'sixties and 'seventies are nothing like as loud or ill-informed as similar attacks on jazzing and jiving were in their day - have quite lately turned to the very music we have been reading about in this book. Nostalgia has become respectable. In a North Carolina town with the delightful name of Pleasant Garden, Clyde Hahn directs the Coon-Sanders Original Nighthawks Club, and annually there are conventions of as many members as can attend to hear music, live and recorded. As many of the old-timers as are able have joined the club, and its members enjoy themselves reminiscing or being interviewed by younger members who have only the records from 'way back to show them what it was like. It is quite amazing how many nostalgias are in their twenties, thirties, even their teens, and cannot possibly have any first-hand memories of what went on in the inter-war years when dance bands were at their most popular. True, these nostalgia-by-proxy adherents to the things of the past are in a minority among their contemporaries, most of whom are apparently eager to maintain the generation gap by pouring scorn on music they associate with the formalities and starchiness of Ballroom Championships and television shows such as *Come Dancing*; but they exist, nonetheless.

In England, nostalgia has taken the form of small societies dedicated principally to the 'thirties in general and Al Bowlly in particular. (There is also a

group that centres its devotion round Arthur Tracy, "The Street Singer," and another that exists to cherish the memory and the music of "Fats" Waller.) On both sides of the Atlantic, the major record companies have for some time been doing quite a roaring trade in the production of long-playing records made up of original performances to which these companies still hold the rights. They have been competing for the best-packaged album set, Columbia offering LPs of great stage personalities while RCA Victor, in what they call their "Vintage" Series, have at different times recalled a single year by a selection of its outstanding dance-band and popular vocal performances, or a band per disc, thus keeping alive the memory of such as Coon-Sanders' Original Nighthawks, Paul Whiteman, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, George Olsen and others. Nostalgia has become Big Business.

It is said that the big band business more or less died because it became too expensive to maintain fifteen men on a dead man's music, although why this should be in the Age of Affluence is somewhat hard to understand. The fact is surely that the youngsters had tired of the dance music of their elders. It had admittedly rather got into a rut, whereas what was wanted was something that was "in the groove," to use the argot of the 'fifties. Four shaggy young men wielding electric guitars and drums provided the reaction to the graceful white-tie-and-tails ballroom types. Those of us who deprecate this deliberate slovenliness may confidently await the counter-reaction which is bound to come. Maybe it will not be tomorrow, next year, even this side of 1980. No one but a fool will be so rash as to predict when the change will come, or what form it will take when it does, still less what external influence will bring it about.

It might be diverting, however, to make a suggestion. The Dixieland Band music was a violent reaction to the soupy strings and twangy batteries of banjos that were in vogue up to 1919 or thereabouts. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones symbolized revolt against something that had become stylized with massed brass and saxophones. Could it be that original sound through the use of unusual instrumentation is the answer? By this I am not suggesting bands consisting entirely of electronic devices or even computers (there is a long-playing record containing a track on which a computerized instrument plays and sings the Victorian chorus "hit" *Daisy Bell*!), but the production of dance music by means of skilled musicians, perhaps no more than six or seven in number, more than likely only five, using instruments long-accepted in conventional musical organizations. A typical "ultra-modern" group might consist of french horn, oboe, flute, harp and 'cello, the first three replacing the brass and reed sections of a between-wars dance band, the 'cello filling out the background and the harp providing the rhythm customarily given by piano and guitar. Percussion might be provided by xylophone or marimba. The

repertoire should consist of existing tunes, with no age-limit, freely augmented by new numbers. It may be argued that such a combination would not offer sufficient rhythmic impetus to dance. I say it would, for if handled correctly and scored intelligently, a seductive rhythmic effect could be achieved, backing a melody line that would be as enticing to listen to as the rhythm would be for dancing. It might involve the devising of new dance forms – but that too would be all to the good, and surely not beyond the capabilities of the experts.

Most of the big band names of the quarter-century between the appearance in England of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and the disappearance from England of Major Glenn Miller have gone now, or have long taken up other occupations, or have retired and now play only for their own amusement. Most of the survivors are intrigued and flattered to think that their efforts and achievements of long ago are now the centre of so much interest and even adulation. The majority are gratified and quite ready to talk and reminisce; memories that begin perhaps somewhat vaguely gradually clarify as the conversation progresses; as a record is played, a photograph is produced, a long-forgotten incident suddenly comes clearly into focus. Billy Jones, the English pianist who replaced Russel Robinson with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1919, recalls how he was quietly reading the evening paper in the band's dressing-room when Larry Shields, somewhat the worse for having defied his country's Prohibition laws from the safety of London, picked a quarrel that ended by Billy Jones being knocked out. When he came round in hospital, a very sober and almost tearfully contrite Larry Shields was waiting by his bedside to offer his abject apologies (normally he was the mildest and most gentle of men). . . . The late Ted Heath, hero of countless recording sessions, recalled two very amusing incidents that are worth repeating here. He was due to play an afternoon session for Vocalion Records under the direction of Harry Bidgood in their new studios in Holland Park, West London, and with nothing booked for the morning, had played golf some distance from town. (He defeated Sylvester Ahola when they competed for the Ambrose Band Golf Cup in the summer of 1930.) After the game, he happened to check his diary and found if he was extremely lucky with the traffic, he might just make the distance between the golf course and the studio. Without stopping to change, he drove as fast as he dared and arrived, still in golf gear (including spiked boots), clutching his trombone. As he walked across the new parquet floor of the studio, an irate voice yelled at him from the control room: "Hey you! Get off that floor with those — boots!" Humbly, Ted Heath sat down on the nearest chair, removed the offensive boots, and played the date in his stocking feet. The other occasion was a session for Imperial records under the direction of Sid Greening. The acoustic method of

recording into a large metal horn was still in use, and in a none-too-spacious studio, soundproofed against the noise of Farringdon Road traffic, on a warm day, conditions of work were far from comfortable, for the musicians had to sit cramped round the horn, some on high stools (Ted Heath was one of these; his trombone slide would otherwise have constituted a danger to the man in front of him, and if he sat any nearer, the big sound of his instrument would have been a menace to the crude but easily damaged mechanism that constituted the recording apparatus).

On this particular occasion, the band, specially assembled for recording, made a dozen sides. (These were the days before union regulations decreed that four sides equalled a session.) There was a pause after the last one, and the weary musicians were packing up their instruments when the recording engineer, not noted for his temperate habits, emerged unsteadily from the control room and mumbled, "Shorry, boyah . . . f'got to fix the horn to the cutting-head . . . we'll have to do 'em all again!" "We felt like busting his twelve blank waxes over his head," said Ted Heath.

Lew Stone told me how, one day when his banjo player had a new car and arrived in it at the studio, he was boasting about his new possession. The others in the band got a little bored by this, so they took Lew on one side during a break in the session and asked him to keep the banjoist back on some pretext; Lew did so, and the others went outside and deflated the tyres of the much-discussed new car, which also deflated some of the vanity of its owner.

Bill Rank, having been a member of two bands that each contained Bix Beiderbecke, has a fund of true stories about him; one is that when the Goldkette

German-Polish-Jewish band leader who made good in England and the USA (1933).



band was playing a short engagement somewhere, Bill Rank and Bix shared a room. Bill knew that Bix was supposed to be "drying out" after a bout of drinking, but he also saw him coming in one night with a large container full of illicit liquor. Bix was so far gone that he gave no trouble when Bill got him to bed; after he had gone to sleep, Bill hid the gin, where he knew Bix would never find it. In the morning, Bix searched high and low for his trophy, finally asking Bill if he had had it with him when he came in the night before. "No," said Bill, "you didn't have any gin with you, Bix." The same thing happened again and again, and Bix never found his gin. Gradually Bill kept him sober - then the engagement ended, the band moved on, Bix got into other, far less responsible company, and the whole business started again.

The European continent during the turbulent years between 1919 and 1944 had its famous bands also, based on the Anglo-American pattern for the most part. During the 'twenties, most of these were much less abreast of the latest American trends than were their British counterparts. France had Billy Max and Tom Waltham, the latter an English pianist who lived and worked in Paris; Germany offered remarkably good performances by a concert violinist named Marek Weber, who, like Paul Whiteman, could include "hot" dance music and serious, even quasi-religious concert music in his programmes and delight his audiences with both. Germany was favoured by the advent of American leaders such as Alex Hyde and Sam Wooding, and thus, like Britain, was exposed to the original article; most other national bands absorbed what they could from records or perhaps from radio receivers powerful enough to pick up transatlantic broadcasts. Eric Borchard had a competent semi-Dixieland unit as far back as 1923, and this made hosts of sides in Berlin for Deutsche Grammophon records.

In the 'thirties, excellent dance bands fairly blossomed in Europe: in France, Ray Ventura, "the French Jack Hylton," employed Danny Polo on clarinet and saxophones before Ambrose did, and throughout the decade this band provided first-class dance music for the average dancers and good quality "swing" music for the connoisseur. Even in Hitler's Germany, though Marek Weber, a Polish Jew, escaped to America via Britain, there were Teddy Stauffer and his Original Teddies, a better-than-average dance band; Peter Kreuder at the piano directing a small unit on the lines of Eddy Duchin or Carroll Gibbons; and a smaller group that offered more advanced dance music, known as Die Goldene Sieben. Holland had a fine band called the Ramblers that was based at the Casino Hamdorff in Laren, and which visited London in 1932 and 1933, and in Belgium, a surprising number of first-class bands led by such as Charles Remue ("and his Hot Stompers"), Gus DeLoof, Stan Brenders, Fud Candrix and Robert De Kers provided a variety

of entertainment considering the relatively small area of the country.

Italy produced relatively few dance bands in the American sense; yet a very large number of American dance-band musicians are of obvious Italian origin, as their names testify. Few American or British musicians visited Italy in the inter-war years. Spain was favoured by Sam Wooding's fine all-negro band in 1929; it had come from New York in May, 1925 to play in Berlin, but toured Western Europe, including a short season in London in the autumn of 1926, for some years. Spain has not produced any dance musicians comparable to the foregoing, and American dance music seems to have had little appeal for the Balkan and other Southern European nations.

The dance music of the years we have been remembering (or at any rate examining!) seems strange to most of the young people of the 'seventies. A teenager in 1971, was being told by her mother - by no means an aged crone - that she used to dance in the arms of her partner, and that there were certain definite steps to be performed, and that the atmosphere induced by the music was romantic, or exciting in the sense that it was gay and frivolous. Miss 1971 could not understand any of this; to her, when she danced, it was wholly a matter of doing your own thing, and to blazes with your partner, even if you had one. The louder and more raucous and primitive the music, the better. "Romance" was kids' stuff, or strictly for sloppy old fools in their late 'thirties or older.

The great musicians, leaders and arrangers of inter-war dance music raised the idiom from its jerky, precisely syncopated, often semi-military beginnings to a genuine minor art form. They developed it according to the times in which they lived and worked, and thanks to the gramophone record, their efforts can still be enjoyed today alike by those who lived through those days, and those who did not, but who for one reason or another wish they had. The barriers erected by those who should have known better against the "new rhythm style" of the 'twenties and the "swing" of the 'thirties came crashing down before the onslaught of a Duke Ellington, a Lew Stone, a Ray Noble, a Sid Phillips, a Bill Challis, a Roy Bargy or a Fletcher Henderson. The truly great serious musicians, all the way from Ernest Ansermet, Enrico Caruso and Fritz Kreisler to Leopold Stokowski, André Previn and Leonard Bernstein understood, and publicly approved of what the dance-band men were doing. The clergyman who condemned the dance music of his day - the late 'twenties - was evidently unmindful of the invocation in the 150th Psalm: "Praise ye the Lord. . . . Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet. . . . Praise Him with the timbrel and dance: praise Him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise Him upon the loud cymbals: praise Him upon the high sounding cymbals. . . ." Evidently David the psalmist was something of a dance-band musician too.

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THE DANCE BANDS

Books on jazz abound; but strangely, only a handful have ever dealt, even partially, with dance bands. Yet it was the dance bands that had the greater impact on popular culture—so great an impact that the quarter century from the end of World War I to the end of World War II is rightly called the Dance Band Era. Brian Rust chronicles it, here and abroad, with color and style.

The Twenties belonged to Paul Whiteman—but the King of Jazz led more a dance and stage band than a jazz ensemble. Brian Rust captures "Pops," but not to the neglect of Sam Lanin, Art Hickman, Vincent Lopez, Jack Hylton and Ted Lewis; nor of the jazz-flavored orchestras of Jean Goldkette, Fletcher Henderson, Ben Pollack, and the California Ramblers; nor even of exotic figures like Thelma Terry, Coon-Sanders' Original Nighthawks, and the Savoy Orpheans.

In this volume, the sweet bands come into their own. The Thirties were not only the Swing Era but also the great decade of the sweet bands: Guy Lombardo, Hal Kemp, Isham Jones, Ray Noble, Kay Kyser, dozens more.

The first singing superstars also emerged during the Depression: Rudy Vallee, Bing Crosby, Russ Columbo. Others, not as popular, often surpassed the superstars in vocal artistry: Mildred Bailey, Al Bowlly, Ruth Etting and old *sui generis* himself, Louis Armstrong.

The Dance Band Era came to a golden climax in the late Thirties and early Forties with the big-band explosion. Glenn Miller's was number one, but Harry James, the Dorseys, Goodman and Shaw commanded loyal legions. Just behind the leaders followed scores of memorable bands: black and white, sweet and hot and a little of both. They're all here.

Brian Rust, with the help of 143 photographs, brings this golden age into focus. Long acknowledged as the world's leading discographer both of jazz (*Jazz Records 1897-1942*) and of popular music (*The Complete Entertainment Discography*), Mr. Rust now makes his first prose contribution to the wonderful music he has already documented in such depth.

CAN YOU NAME THE MUSICAL GROUPS THAT PLAYED UNDER THESE NAMES AND TAG LINES?

*(The answers are all in these
fascinating pages.)*

The Band That Plays the Blues
Hotel Astor Orchestra
Rippling Rhythm
Blue Four
Cocoanut Grove Orchestra
Tic-Toc Rhythm
Queen's Dance Orchestra
The Orange Blossom Band
The Royal Canadians
The Ipana Troubadors

CAN YOU NAME THE PERFORMERS KNOWN BY THESE TITLES OR NICKNAMES?

The Idol of the Air Lanes
Papa Joe
The High-Hatted Tragedian of Jazz
The Sweetheart of the Forces
Snakehips
The Street Singer
That Sentimental Gentleman
of Swing
The Whispering Cornetist
The Waltz King
The Old Left-Hander

A selection of the Nostalgia
Book Club

3 Happy days are here again

Ask anyone, whether they can recall the nineteen-twenties or not, what comes first to their minds when they hear that decade mentioned, and among the answers will certainly be such things as 2LO (the name of the British Broadcasting Company's London station), the Charleston or the Black Bottom, long cigarette-holders, skirts so short they actually displayed the wearer's knees when she was standing, Rudolph Valentino, the Wembley Exhibition and the General Strike. That is, if they are British; if American, they will probably include all these except the first item and the last two, substituting raccoon coats, hip-flasks, Al Capone and Charles Lindbergh.

The period from 1923 until the end of the decade was indeed a lawless, crazy era. Pillion-riding, flag-pole-squatting, marathon dancing, and evading the Prohibition law were prominent in American popular interests. It was a colourful time, bursting with good cheer, and nowhere is this more accurately reflected than in the popular songs. Even the sentimental ballads were played by boisterous dance bands at tempi that made it difficult at times for the featured vocalist (who usually sang through a large megaphone, there being no microphones for amplifying the sound) to get the words out, and which usually made nonsense of them when he did. One singer who appeared on the scene at the height of this crazy era had only the merest mutter of a voice, however, yet by magnificent projection, he managed to make himself heard in a theatre without artificial aid: Whispering Jack Smith.

At the beginning of the five-year period from 1924 to 1929, however, vocalists with dance bands were still the exception rather than the rule. It was in the summer of that year (which in Britain was one of the wettest on record, a fact which coincided ironically with the arrival from America of a homespun nonsense song called *It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo'*) that a young student from Yale University, of mixed French Canadian and Irish descent, named Herbert Vallée, made the journey from the USA to London. He was quite a good saxophone player; good enough, in fact, to have been given the nickname "Rudy" after Rudy

Wiedoeft, whose undoubted mastery of the instrument he idolized while still at school. He was invited to join the Savoy Havana Band, and for a year he played first also saxophone with this unit, appearing at the famous concerts the Savoy bands gave in London's Queen's Hall (destroyed by enemy action in the second world war) between January and March, 1925. He made many records with the Havana Band, but although he attempted to sing the vocal parts occasionally in public, he never appeared in this capacity on records; indeed, his voice was considered quite unsuitable by his colleagues – the management and the leader, Cyril Ramon Newton, who sang the lyrics himself when required.

Twenty-four-year-old Rudy Vallée returned to America in the summer of 1925, and resumed his studies at Yale; nothing more was heard of him until a few records began to appear in America on Columbia's "dime-store" label, Harmony, some of them crossing the Atlantic and appearing in England on the Regal label, early in 1929. Although the labels stated "Rudy Vallée and his Connecticut Yankees," in fact the band was a small unit – eight men basically, sometimes augmented by a trumpet and trombone – that played a rather unambitious accompaniment to the leader's singing. With his good looks, affably self-effacing way of delivering his songs and quiet humour, Rudy Vallée was an instant and enormous success. He broadcast from the Heigh-Ho Club in New York (his first smash hit was *Heigh-Ho, Everybody, Heigh-Ho*, and he introduced his show with this phrase), later opening his own – didn't they all? – under the name of the Villa Vallée. Not content with being a singing bandleader (he still played saxophone and clarinet, but it was the Vallée voice, projected through a megaphone, that fluttered the female hearts), he also took part in stage shows, films such as *Sweet Music and The Vagabond Lover*. The theme song of the latter, *I'm Just A Vagabond Lover*, was perhaps his biggest success in sentimental songs. He wrote it himself; he also arranged a drinking-song from Maine University and made it a world-wide hit in 1930: *The Stein Song*. (It was even given a rather awkward French lyric and

trivial event such as a general strike should upset his tour, Whiteman returned to the States in May, and after the summer vacation, went out to California. At the end of the year, during a short engagement in Los Angeles, he heard a singing act that took his fancy. He was introduced to the two young men, and offered them a position in his band as a special attraction. They were Bing Crosby and Al Rinker.

By a strange coincidence, while Paul Whiteman was in England in the spring of 1926, another American bandleader, Paul Specht, appeared in the Empress Rooms in London. The coincidence lies in the fact that both Pauls were in London at the same time as each other exactly three years earlier; Specht's orchestra had not grown perceptibly, however. Indeed, compared with its full strength as appearing in America, it was one man short. This was one of the two trumpet players, Charlie Spivak, of Polish ancestry. His passport was held up for some reason and had still not come through as the band went aboard the *Aquitania* on April 13, so Spivak was literally left on the quay, and the entire trumpet work was done by the remaining player, Sylvester Ahola.

No more splendid musician could have coped with this situation. Born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1902, of Finnish parents, "Hooley" as his friends call him, decided as a boy on his father's farm to become a first-class trumpet-player. (He also describes himself as a frustrated drummer, and today, still in fine fettle physically, he can play drums as masterfully as he does his trumpet, not to mention the mellophone, and a veritable museum of brass instruments of all kinds, from a tiny British cavalry cornet to a shofar, or ram's-horn, used in Jewish religious services, though he is not himself Jewish. He also even manages to produce music of unbelievable sonority from a mouthpiece, a length of garden hose and a tin funnel.) He had worked with numerous bands in Massachusetts, notably that of Frank E. Ward, with whom he made his first records, in 1924. He joined Paul Specht four months before setting out on the trip to London.

The British capital made a strong appeal to "Hooley," and when he married his childhood sweetheart a few months after returning to the States, he promised her he would one day return to London with her. The chance came sooner than perhaps either of them expected; after leaving Specht in February, 1927, and working with Ed Kirkeby and the California Ramblers, Peter Van Steeden's Half Moon Hotel Orchestra and Adrian Rollini's New Yorkers (alongside Bix Beiderbecke, Frankie Trumbauer and other great musicians), he was approached by the leader of the Savoy Havana Band, Reggie Batten, who was then in New York looking for talent to make the new Savoy Orpheans a worthy successor to the original. "Hooley" grabbed the opportunity with both hands, and duly arrived with Mrs Ahola and the other American musicians Batten had engaged.



Left: Duke Ellington and his Orchestra very much in action (mid-30s).

Above: Sylvester Ahola, 1966.

The new band opened in the Savoy on January 1, 1928, but despite its pianist being one of the finest arrangers in the business at that time - Irving Brodsky, late of the California Ramblers - the hotel policy left little for it to do that could not have been successfully accomplished by any competent dance band. Its opposite number in the ballroom was a daringly forward-looking group under the direction of a young Spanish-American named Fred Elizalde, fresh from Cambridge, where his Quinquaginta Ramblers had been a sensation among the growing legion of those who could distinguish great dance music from the commonplace. In the Elizalde band were three other members of the California Ramblers, Chelsea Quealey on trumpet, Bobby Davis on clarinet and alto saxophone, and no less a personality than Adrian Rollini himself, on bass saxophone, goofus, hot fountain-pen and sometimes piano and drums.

The new Savoy Orpheans' task was to supply more or less straight dance music to balance the "modern" style of the Elizalde band. This they did; but when their contract expired at the end of September, 1928, it was not renewed. Elizalde was on his own. Most of the American contingent of the Orpheans went home; "Hooley" was instantly offered a position in Ambrose's band in the May Fair Hotel, where it had played since the opening of that magnificent building on March 28, 1927. He worked with Ambrose until August, 1931, making an impression on his colleagues and friends that remains to this day. Though they have not seen him for forty years, ex-members of the Ambrose Orchestra still recall the unsurpassed musicianship of Sylvester Ahola, who was, and still is at this writing as much at home playing the solo part of Haydn's Concerto for Trumpet as a beautifully conceived "hot" improvisation on something like *Sugar Blues* (or *Don't Do That To The Poor Pussy Cat*,

of the band able to read music. "I would get the new numbers as they were published," he says, "and would play them over to the other boys, who would stand close by the piano, trying over what I played. Their musical memories were so great, that once they had the number fixed in their minds, we didn't need the sheet music any more." Each time the new number was played, someone – usually cornettist LaRocca or clarinetist Shields – would think up something to "say" about it that he had not said before, with the result it came out slightly different each time. Two versions of each master were made when they came to the domed studios of the Columbia Graphophone Company in Clerkenwell Road, London, and in the case of *Manney O' Mine*, both were put on sale. The final chorus of each is constructed on entirely different lines, and there are subtle differences in the earlier part of each rendering.

Usually when these impromptu "conversations of instruments" took place, everything fell into place perfectly. How this could happen can only be explained in terms of the tremendous musical affinity existing between the members of the band, which also explains why it was so difficult to find replacements when they were needed. Other bands – and there were many, of course, human nature being what it is – did their best to climb on the jazz-band wagon. Billy Arnold's was just one; another five-piece unit that did its best to emulate the example of the LaRocca band was led by showman-pianist Earl Fuller, who also had a larger, more conventional orchestra modelled on the lines of Joseph C Smith's (and for a while featuring the latter's subsequent drummer-xylophonist Teddy Brown). The larger band played in the New York Rector's Club; the smaller seems to have been principally a vaudeville act, whose speciality was the clarinet playing of a young man who set out on his own as a leader, using some of Earl Fuller's men, finding fame and fortune through his mock-tragedian method of putting a song over: Ted Lewis (see Chapters 2 and 3). Fuller's smaller group also used a jerky cornet player, and though described as a jazz band, it sounded more like a small military band attempting to play ragtime. The best and most genuine-sounding five-piece jazz band that remained in America and made records by which its value can be assessed, while the Dixieland Band was conquering new worlds in the Old World, was the New Orleans Jazz Band, playing at a somewhat dubious establishment on 125th Street in New York known as the Alamo Café. The leader was a ragtime pianist of considerable talent, but his fame today rests on the breadth of his humour and the size of his nose, for this was no less a personality than Jimmy Durante, nicknamed "Schnozzle." At their best, the Durante men could sound very much like LaRocca's, working in the same happy idiom of instrumental conversation, but they were never noticed by either of the two major gramophone companies, Victor and Columbia, and

it was left to two relative newcomers to the American gramophone scene to perpetuate their music. These were the Starr Piano Company of Richmond, Indiana, whose Gennett label was the starting-point of the recording careers of many front-rank musicians in the jazz and dance-band world, and the General Phonograph Corporation of New York, whose OKeh label was then issuing only "hill-and-dale" records on which the grooves undulated up and down, instead of from side to side as more conventional makes did, and which could only be played on their own or on specially adapted machines. Sales were thus not large, and the few records they made disappeared from circulation very quickly.

But if Victor and Columbia were not interested in recording genuine jazz music for the good of posterity and their own bank accounts, they certainly showed great enthusiasm for obtaining the services of other, perhaps more conventional dance bands. I have described earlier how the empathy of the members of the best five-piece jazz bands enabled them to produce perfectly co-ordinated performances each time. Out in San Francisco, at the Fairmont Hotel, there was a band that was ultimately to become perhaps the most internationally famous of all American bands during the next two decades. Its leader was a viola player named Paul Whiteman, who came from a musical family in Denver, Colorado, where he was born on March 28, 1890. At seventeen, he was first viola player in the Denver Symphony Orchestra, having been trained by his father and others. He played in San Francisco in 1915 in the World's Fair Orchestra under the famous composer-conductor Victor Herbert, later joining the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra conducted by Alfred Hertz. As jazz became the national craze, Whiteman decided to try and play it, but found that while it would come out right sometimes when spot-improvised, too often it would emerge as sheer cacophony. His strictly legitimate musical training led him to the conclusion that if what came out right were written down like a symphonic score, and everything played subsequently on the theme in question was played from that score, it would come out right every time. (He completely failed to grasp the basic fact about jazz that, while it could be scored, the best, most free and spontaneous results were obtained from musicians who knew and understood the idiom and each other. Any other approach would be at best paying a kind of lip-service to the new idiom.)

Paul Whiteman eventually became the leader of a band in the Alexandria Hotel in Los Angeles. His pianist was a gifted arranger named Ferdie Crofé, with whom he had attempted to play jazz while both

Top: Jimmy "Schnozzle" Durante and his jazz band, 1920.

Bottom: The famous Whiteman caricature label 1928 (Bing Crosby sang the vocal).